SECRET SERVICE

OLD AND YOUNG KING BRADY, DETECTIVES.

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THE MAN IN THE STEEL MASK;

OR

THE BRADYS' WORK FOR A GREAT FORTUNE.

"Be sure and take down every word that I say," said the steel mask to Young King Brady. Old King Brady stood by an interested [illegible]

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THE MAN IN THE STEEL MASK

OR,

The Bradys' Work for a Great Fortune.

BY A NEW YORK DETECTIVE.

CRAIG NICHOLS, Dealer in NOVELS & POST CARDS, Old Fairfield, Send in Your Wants, CHILI, N. Y.

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERIOUS PAPER.

"Do you see that clock on the mantel?"

"Yes."

"And you observe it is just three minutes to nine?"

"I do."

"At precisely nine o'clock I am going to discharge the revolver I am holding at your head, unless you sign this paper."

A deathly silence followed this threat.

It was a singular scene.

The two men who were speaking occupied the library of a country mansion on the outskirts of New York, owned by Hiram Ranger, a wealthy, retired merchant.

He sat bound hand and foot in an armchair beside a centre table, his white bearded face as pale as death as he glared at the other man.

This person had a strange look.

He was tall, well-built, and wore a long coat and felt hat.

But his features were concealed by a hideous steel mask. It was made of a finely woven web, and pierced by two holes through which his jet black eyes gleamed like balls of fire.

In one of his gloved hands he held a folded paper, and in the other, a pistol.

The old gentleman had been quietly reading his evening paper, when this weird person stole into the room through an open window behind his back.

A blow stunned Mr. Ranger and when he came to he was bound in his chair.

The man in the steel mask stood beside him, and the dialogue above followed. The old merchant was thinking, and he finally asked:

"Why are you doing this?"

"That is a secret," replied the masked man.

"Explain the contents of that paper."

"I shall do nothing of the kind."

"But how can I sign that paper without knowing what it says?"

"Either do as I order, or I'll fire, I tell you."

The tones of his deep voice were terribly in earnest.

Mr. Ranger was tempted to shout for help. But he dared not. He knew it would be a signal for this unknown person to shoot him.

He carefully studied the man in the steel mask.

At most, he could only see that he had black hair and large eyes.

"One minute!"

These words hissed in Mr. Ranger's ear startled him.

"Give me time to think it over," he pleaded.

"Not an extra moment!" was the stern reply.

There was another spell of silence.

Finally the masked man exclaimed sharply:

"Two minutes!"

Mr. Ranger burst into a cold sweat.

He knew he might injure himself greatly by signing that paper. There was no limit to the danger it might get him in.

Again he felt like shouting for aid.

One look at that grim pistol, an inch from his head, changed his mind.

In an agony of mind he listened to the busy clock tick-

ing away the seconds which made up the last minute he had to decide in.

Then the harsh voice rang out again:

"Time is up!"

For an instant the old merchant wavered; then he said huskily:

"I will sign! Release me!"

"You have saved your life."

"Give me a pen."

The man in the steel mask took a step toward the open desk.

He paused, glanced back, and uttered in distinct tones:

"Any treachery, to betray me will cost your life."

"I understand. Get the pen."

The stranger took a pen up from the desk, and dipped it in the ink.

Going back to his victim, he loosed his right arm only, laid the folded paper on the table, gave the pen to Mr. Ranger, and exclaimed:

"Sign here!"

The old gentleman affixed his signature.

No sooner was this done, when the masked man pocketed the paper.

"I wish you good-night," he remarked politely.

And gliding over to the open window he disappeared in the garden.

Mr. Ranger sat bound in his chair so he could not move.

He was just about to call for assistance when there came a knock at the hall door, it opened, and his butler entered, saying:

"Step right in, gentlemen, he was expecting you."

"James!" roared Mr. Ranger.

"Yessir! It's Old and Young King Brady, sir."

"Ah, the detectives!"

"Yessir! Yessir!"

"Come in here—quick! All of you!"

The tones of his excited voice expressed his alarm.

James was ushering two strangers in.

They were the two most famous detectives in the world.

He known as Old King Brady was an eccentric-looking man.

His tall, powerful figure was clad in an old blue coat, which he wore tightly buttoned up to a white collar and its old-fashioned stock.

Beneath the brim of his white felt hat his strong features and iron grey hair could not be seen very plainly.

He was a man who never failed of his purpose.

He was known and feared by every crook in the country.

And he justly deserved the wonderful fame he enjoyed.

The boy with him was the veteran detective's pupil.

His name was Harry Brady, but he was no relation to Old King Brady.

He was strong, courageous, and a clever detective.

In dress he resembled the old officer, and like his tutor he was reserved, terse of speech, quick to act, and greatly feared by the crooks.

The moment the two detectives entered the dimly lit library their quick glances took in the situation.

Old King Brady hastened over to Mr. Ranger and cut his bonds.

"I see you've been in trouble," the detective exclaimed.

"Serious trouble," replied the old merchant.

"Who did this—thieves?"

"No; listen, and I'll tell you about it."

He briefly explained his adventure.

The two detectives and the butler listened in silence.

"Now, what do you think about it?" asked Mr. Ranger, when he finished.

"I think we had better find the man in the steel mask, and make him explain his singular actions for himself," replied Old King Brady.

"A very sensible plan."

"How long has he been gone?"

"Just five minutes," replied Mr. Ranger, glancing at the clock.

"Harry, will you try to find his trail?"

"Certainly," answered the boy, with a nod.

He hastened to the open window, and passed out.

"James!"

"Yessir."

"Fetch me a glass of ice water."

"Very well, sir."

James left the room.

Left alone with the old merchant, Old King Brady said:

"Well, we are here at the time you set for our call, when you telephoned to the central office of the Secret Service Commission in New York to-day."

"I was expecting you," answered Mr. Ranger.

"For what purpose did you send for us?"

"I have some work cut out for you."

"And it is?——"

"To unravel a strange mystery."

"Explain the case, Mr. Ranger."

The old detective took a chew of plug tobacco.

He then withdrew a pencil and a note-book from his breast pocket.

"Eighteen years ago," said Mr. Ranger, "my father and stepmother died, leaving behind my stepbrother, Andrew Blake, and myself. Blake inherited their money and I secured this house. Blake became dissipated and squandered his money. He and I quarrelled over it and separated. He went to the dogs. One year later a foundling was left on my door step. I took the little baby in and adopted her. She grew to be a beautiful young girl. I still have her living with me. In fact, I have willed my fortune to her. Now, what I want of you, is to find out who Daisy's parents were, and why they left her at my door."

"As this happened so long ago, it may not be possible," said Old King Brady, making notes of the case in his book. "Have you any clew for me to work on?"

"Yes. It is a baby's gold bracelet which I took from her wrist on the night I found her. See, inside is engraved: 'Daisy Dean, from Mamma!'"

"A good clew," commented the detective, taking the ornament and examining it.

"The girl never knew but what she was my own daughter

till recently when I told her her early history. She now naturally wants to know who her parents are."

"I'll see what I can do about the matter. Are you married, Mr. Ranger?"

"No. I'm a bachelor without a relation in the world except Andrew Blake."

"Who lives here with you and your adopted daughter?"

"Only Fred Woods, my secretary, besides the cook, chambermaid and butler. I discharged Woods this evening. We had a quarrel. He wanted to marry Daisy. I opposed it."

"I see. Now, have you any enemies?"

"None that I know of. Why do you ask?"

"On account of the strange call you received from the masked man."

A troubled look crossed the old merchant's face.

"I can't understand that mysterious action at all," he ...ned. "My head aches dreadfully from the blow he gave me, and I—I——"

His face had become very pale again and he sank back in his chair.

Old King Brady jumped toward the old gentleman and supported him in his arms.

"Oh, Lord!" exclaimed the butler in frightened tones. "The master is sick!"

"Give me a glass of that water—quick!" he exclaimed.

Just then James returned with a pitcher of ice-water.

He rushed over with the water.

One swallow seemed to revive Mr. Ranger a little.

He rose to his feet.

"If you will excuse me," he faltered, "I'll go to bed."

"Certainly," replied Old King Brady. "I'll go."

"Call again."

"Thank you. I'll be here to-morrow, if I gain news about the parentage of Daisy Dean. Good night, Mr Ranger."

"Good night, sir."

Old King Brady left the room.

CHAPTER II.

A LOVERS' QUARREL.

As Old King Brady stepped down upon the tree shaded path the moon burst from behind the heavy storm clouds.

It had been raining hard an hour before.

A shadowy figure glided from behind one of the big elm trees and, approaching the detective, asked in low tones:

"Who's that?"

"Old King Brady," replied the detective. "Is that Harry?"

"Yes."

"What luck did you have?"

"The man in the steel mask escaped."

"Did you trace him?"

"Yes. He left his footprints in the soft ground under of the Hudson river. The imprints that pointed toward Ranger's house came from the same spot."

"Then you infer that he came here in a boat and departed in it?"

"Exactly."

"Didn't you see anything of him on the river?"

"No. When I got there, he was gone from view."

"He has covered up his tracks very carefully."

"Yes, and it would be hard to find him now."

"I wish I knew what the paper said which he made Mr. Ranger sign."

"What did the old merchant want of us?"

Old King Brady laughed, and replied:

"His adopted daughter was a foundling named Daisy Dean, left in her infancy on his doorstep. He wants us to find out who her parents were."

Young King Brady laughed too.

He looked rather disappointed though.

"What bosh!" he exclaimed. "That kind of work is not in our line. The Secret Service isn't kept to find long lost parents for waifs. Mr. Ranger should have hired a private detective to solve his little family mystery."

"Of course. I knew that. But I didn't like to say so to a sick man. That thump he got on the head made him very ill. We'll do what we can for him. As there's nothing important in this case, let us get back to New York, and tell the chief. He's got another case ready for us."

"What is it?"

"To run down the river thieves. They have been bothering the harbor police a great deal lately. We've been asked by the commissioners to help them out. There's dangerous work ahead for us, Harry."

"I've heard they are a pretty tough gang."

The two detectives walked away.

A few minutes after they were gone a man crawled out stealthily from under the piazza, and gazed after their retreating forms.

He was the man in the steel mask.

"The Bradys!" he muttered. "Well, I fooled them all right. Thought I came and went in a boat, eh? Queer they didn't suspect I came up the shore in the shallow water and waded back into it to hide my tracks. Walking is good enough for me on an errand of this kind. A boat would have been a dead give-away. Oh, no; no boats for me. Instead of Harry Brady finding me at the river,I was making a detour, on my way back here. It's lucky I saw him coming back, and hid under the piazza, or I wouldn't have heard what their future plans are."

A quiet chuckle escaped him.

He then strode away, keeping in the densest shadows, and disappeared around an angle of the house.

The two detectives were heading for the railroad depot.

As they were about to turn an abrupt bend in the road, Harry paused and caught hold of Old King Brady's arm, stopping him too.

"Hark!" he muttered.

"Two people standing talking in the bushes just ahead there."

"Rather suspicious."

Crouching behind the bushes, they parted the branches and peered through.

A beautiful young girl and a young man were standing beside the road engaged in a heated argument.

The girl was short, dark, and handsomely attired, and her companion was a tall, slender fellow with light hair and a small light mustache.

"I tell you, Daisy, that your father wronged me by discharging me from his employ simply because I insisted on marrying you," the young man was saying angrily. "You once admitted that you'd marry me some day. I therefor had a right to ask Mr. Ranger's consent."

"But I have changed my mind since then," replied the girl. "My father knew it. That's the reason he refused to let you marry me."

"But why have you gone back on me?"

"I cannot tell you now, Fred," replied the girl, in troubled tones. "My reason is a good one, though. For the present, let it remain a secret."

"That I cannot do. An explanation is due to me. Is it because I am only the private secretary, and your father a rich man?"

"No, no! It isn't that, Fred. Money does not enter into the question."

"Hasn't social position got something to do with it."

"Yes," was the hesitating reply. "But you will understand this better later on. We may yet become man and wife."

"Oh, I see!" interrupted the young man bitterly. "I'm beneath you. I was a fool to expect the heiress of a millionaire to marry a poor man like me. I'm glad I quarrelled with Mr. Ranger. I owe him a grudge for separating me from the girl I love. Some day I may get even with him."

"Fred, don't! Don't speak that way," pleaded the girl in sorrowful tones. "Go back to him. Apologize. He will take you back. We can be together again. When I have the right, I'll tell you why I refused to wed."

"No!" fiercely exclaimed the young man. "I don't humble myself to him. If we must part, let it be right now."

"Fred!" she gasped.

But he rushed away from her, excited, unhappy and very nervous.

The girl burst into tears and turned away.

She sadly made her way back home.

The two detectives felt sorry for the young lovers.

"I know what her secret is," said Old King Brady as they went on toward the depot. "She don't want to marry the man until she finds out who her parents are. It isn't Fred Woods' social position she referred to. It's her own. Pride forbids her marrying her lover until she clears up the mystery of her origin."

"By Jove, I'm so sorry for the pair I'll do all I can to find out who her parents were," said Harry feelingly.

And talking over the matter, they boarded the car and

The Bradys went straight to headquarters and met their chief.

They gave him an account of all that transpired.

He was very much interested in what they told him, especially that part relating to the man in the steel mask.

"No doubt," said he, "the mysterious fellow wears that hideous mask to conceal his identity. There's no telling what his purpose was."

"It is fair to presume his plan was very important," said Old King Brady, "for if it wasn't, he wouldn't go to such desperate methods."

"Well," replied the chief, puffing thoughtfully at his cigar, "neither that chap nor Daisy Dean's case are of business interest to us. Of course you can help the girl to learn her early history if you like. But this department isn't kept for cases of that kind. I've got the river-thieves case for you now."

"Give us the particulars," said Old King Brady.

The chief sat down at his desk and glanced over his notebook.

He soon found the entries he wanted.

"Here it is," he remarked, "now listen: A large number of robberies from ships and docks upon each side of the two rivers have recently occurred. The style of the river pirates' work was the same in all cases. It showed plainly that the gang operating is the one known as the Red Hook Band. They always go masked. As none has ever been captured, it has thus far been impossible to find out who they are."

"I've heard of them," said Harry.

"Well," continued the chief, "the harbor police can't even locate them. They are the cleverest crooks in the business. They baffle every effort to bag them. And they cause more trouble than any gang that ever robbed the docks. They are desperate men, too. They never fail to shoot in self-defence. It shows that they wouldn't hesitate at murder to stay free."

"Have they any particular haunt?" asked Old King Brady.

"No, to-day they might be operating at the Battery. To-morrow you'd hear of them in Harlem. They are regular will-o'-the-wisps. It will require all your nerve and skill to land them. I advise you to watch the junk shops."

"What for?" asked Old King Brady.

"You might catch some of them trying to sell their booty there. They have stolen valuable freight, money, jewelry and a large quantity of ropes, chains, anchors, brass goods and ship-chandlery."

"Were they ever detected in the junk shops by the police?"

"No. But they are on the watch at those places."

"Then we won't go there. That's the last place we'd look for them."

"Why?"

"If the police can't locate them in the junk shops, it is evident they don't go there."

"That idea seems reasonable."

"Has any of the stolen property ever been recovered?"

"Then depend they sell to a 'fence' who gets rid of the swag out of town."

"You have a queer method of deduction," laughed the chief. "You generally go by contraries. You do exactly what other officers don't do. Yet you always succeed."

"Criminals expect an attack in one way. If you go contrary to that way you catch them off their guard. Then you have them. If they commit a felony they try to make the evidence appear exactly the opposite of what it really is."

"Will you take this case?"

"Yes. Give me the names of the river thieves' victims, a description of the stolen articles, and if you've got a description of any of the rascals, let me have that too."

The chief complied.

"When are you going to begin work?" he asked.

"To-morrow night, as the river-men only operate after dark."

"Go armed," warned the chief. "They are desperate men, remember."

"Just so," responded Old King Brady. "Come on, Harry. You'll hear from us as soon as we have anything to report. Good night, chief."

And they left the office together.

Proceeding to their lodging, they planned their course of action, and retired.

At five o'clock on the following morning there came a furious ring at the telephone in their rooms, and Old King Brady answered it.

"Hello! Hello!" he called. "Who is that?"

"Headquarters. Is that you, Old King Brady?"

"Yes, chief. What is the matter?"

"I just received word that Hiram Ranger has been murdered!"

CHAPTER III.

THE DEAD MAN'S WILL.

Old King Brady was intensely startled. He reflected a moment. Then he shouted in the telephone:

"Who gave you the news, chief?"

"Daisy Ranger, over the telephone."

"Who killed him?"

"She don't know. She wants the police there at once."

"Have you sent any one?"

"Not yet. You and Harry can run up and get the details. I'll have a couple of policemen sent up after you. Use no time."

"We'll go at once."

"Good-by."

Old King Brady rang off.

Harry was waiting to hear the news, and got it.

Dressing, the two officers hastened away.

They made a quick trip to the Rangers' residence, and

James, the butler, met them at the door looking the picture of despair.

"Oh, sirs, I'm so glad you've come!" he began, as he admitted the two sleuths.

"Good Lor'! Good Lor'! Such goin's on as there's been here."

"Who killed your master?" demanded Old King Brady sharply.

"Nobody knows, sir, but—we think it's Fred Woods."

"What makes you think so?"

"'Cause I caught him in the act, sir."

"Just cool off. Give us a full explanation."

"Yessir—yessir. You see, it was this way: The master and his secretary had a row, and Mr. Woods was discharged. Well, sir, about midnight I heard a fearful noise in Mr. Ranger's room. It was the master and his secretary having another fuss. You see, although Mr. Fred was discharged, he had not yet left the house for good. Well, I ran to Mr. Ranger's room, pushed open the door, and—oh, Lor'—what do you s'pose I saw?"

"Well—what?" testily asked Harry.

"There was the old master lying dead on the floor beside his bed. Bending over him, with a heavy cane in his hand, was Mr. Woods. The safe door was wide open, and the books and papers it contained were scattered over the floor."

The detectives exchanged glances of deep meaning.

It seemed evident that Woods had taken the revenge they heard him say he would have, the night before.

"Proceed with your story," said Old King Brady, as the butler paused.

"Yessir—yessir," said the excited James, "Well, sir, when Mr. Woods saw me, he rose up, his face pale, and his eyes bulging, and I heard him say: 'I'll be arrested for this!' Then he rushed past me. I tried to stop him. He escaped me and went out the door. I yelled 'Murder,' and roused the two servants and Miss Daisy. They were horrified at the sight, and when I told them about Mr. Woods they one and all declared he must have done it. We waited till morning, then rang up the police on the telephone, and Miss Daisy told them what had happened here."

"Does any one know of the crime yet?"

"Not a soul outside of this house."

"Then keep it a secret till we get through."

"Yessir."

"Show us to Mr. Ranger's bedroom."

The butler obeyed.

It was a large square room on the ground floor.

Besides an ordinary plain bedroom suite, it contained a small safe the door of which stood wide open.

The old merchant lay beside the bed, where he had fallen.

A quick examination by the detectives showed them that he had a fracture of the skull which had evidently caused his death.

The detectives made a rapid examination of the room.

Chief among them was Mr. Ranger's will.

The detectives took possession of the documents.

Every effort was then bent toward finding a clew to the criminal.

There was nothing to be seen in the room except some muddy footprints on the carpet near one of the windows.

Young King Brady turned to James.

"Leave this room!" he exclaimed.

The unhappy butler complied with the order.

Once alone with his partner, Harry pointed at the footprints.

"See there!" said he. "I'll take an exact copy of them."

"What for?" asked Old King Brady in puzzled tones.

"I'll show you in a moment."

The boy took a pencil and sheet of paper from his pocket. He rapidly made an exact copy of the footprints.

When this was done, he said:

"Follow me."

Opening the window nearest to the foot marks, he jumped out into the garden, followed by Old King Brady.

The boy scanned the ground keenly.

Suddenly he exclaimed.

"Look there!"

There were the deep marks of a pair of men's shoes in the soil. The boy compared them with his drawing.

"They are the same," said Old King Brady.

"Yes," replied Harry. "Now come over here."

He led the way to the library window, and searched the ground.

More footprints were quickly found.

Some fitted Harry's own shoes, but the others did not.

"These marks were made last night by me and the masked man," said the boy. "Now, compare them with this drawing."

Old King Brady did as he was requested.

A grim smile crossed his clean-shaven features.

"These marks, the marks outside Mr. Ranger's window, and the footprints on the carpet in the murdered man's room are all alike," said he.

"So much proved," said Harry. "Now, come back into the house."

They went in the main entrance and met the butler.

"Do you know whether Mr. Ranger's bedroom windows were left unlocked last night?" asked Harry.

"They were not," replied James. "They've been latched for a week. I was always very particular about attending to that, sir. But, after Mr. Ranger went to his bedroom, I heard him open a window to let in some fresh air."

A satisfied look crossed Harry's face.

"That settles it," he whispered, drawing Old King Brady aside. "The man in the steel mask was in Mr. Ranger's room last night, after the old gentleman retired. That's evident. The foot marks outside the window and on the carpet prove it. What James says also proves that the masked man was in the room after Mr. Ranger went to bed."

"In that case," said Old King Brady, "Fred Woods was clear then, that if Ranger was murdered in his bedroom, the crime lies between Woods and the masked man."

"That's my theory."

"Both men seem equally guilty, Harry."

"Why?"

"Because if Woods was innocent, he wouldn't be likely to run away."

"I don't agree with you," replied the boy. "Seeing how strong the evidence was against him, might have frightened Woods. Knowing such evidence might convict him, after his threats against his employer, he may have taken fright. Rather than fight a charge, he preferred to hide."

"You speak as if you thought he was innocent."

"Isn't it our rule to judge some cases by contraries?"

"Just so. That leaves but one inference."

"And that is——"

"That the man in the steel mask is the guilty party."

"Such is my opinion," echoed Harry.

"The proof against Woods is strong, though."

"I admit it. But I believe in the American sense of justice—namely, that a man should be considered innocent until he is proven guilty. The French authorities consider a prisoner guilty until he proves his innocence."

Old King Brady nodded.

Turning to James, he asked:

"Where's your telephone?"

"Down the hall, sir."

"Thank you, I'll use it. Harry, post the police to guard the house."

Old King Brady rang up headquarters, and explained the situation.

"This is a case for the coroner," he said in conclusion.

"I'll send one up as soon as possible," replied the chief.

"Do, for we'll need his evidence at once."

As the detective hung up the receiver, Daisy approached him. Her beautiful dark eyes bore traces of weeping.

"Oh, sir," she exclaimed in heartbroken tones. "Isn't this dreadful?"

"Don't worry," kindly answered the old detective. "It will end all right."

"But you surely don't believe Mr. Woods is guilty."

"That we cannot tell yet. The proof against him is strong, though. We heard you talking to him down the road last night. You recollect he said he would get square with your father."

The girl looked startled. She recalled the threats to mind.

"Yes, yes," she muttered. "You tell the truth. I had forgotten it. If I thought he did this foul work, I would turn on him in spite of my love for him."

"Did Mr. Ranger have any money in his safe last night?"

"Yes. A man paid off a five thousand dollar mortgage yesterday afternoon. It was too late to deposit the money in the bank. So father put it in the safe."

"Well, it's gone now."

"Heavens! Was the safe robbed, too?"

"It must have been."

"So it appears. Now, why did your father keep a private secretary?"

"Because he was a man of letters. He had a large estate. He wrote on political subjects. Fred had plenty to do, I can assure you."

"He told me you were his heiress."

"Yes, so I have been informed."

"I've got his will in my pocket. Let me see the extent of his fortune."

Old King Brady drew out the will, and read it.

A startled exclamation burst from his lips when he finished.

"What is the matter?" anxiously asked the girl.

"This will doesn't agree with what Mr. Ranger told me."

"Why not?"

"He said he left you all his fortune."

"Doesn't the will say so?"

"No. By this will he leaves all of his fortune to Andrew Blake, his stepbrother!"

CHAPTER IV.

A LAWYER IN THE CASE.

The young girl looked stunned for an instant. The detective's remark had shown her a very dark future for her.

If she were left friendless and penniless, she realized that she would have a very hard time to get along in the world.

When she recovered her wits, she extended her hand and exclaimed sadly:

"Oh, it cannot be possible, sir."

"You can read the will and see for yourself."

He handed her the paper and she eagerly ran her glance over it.

There was a blank look of despair on her face when she finished.

"You have told the truth," she exclaimed bitterly. "I recognize his signature and the signature of James Gregg, the butler, and Mary Ann O'Brien, the cook, both of whom witnessed the will. I also see the name of Benjamin Harper, his lawyer."

"Where is Mr. Harper to be found?"

"He died a year ago."

"Did you ever see a will made out in your name?"

"Yes. Mr. Ranger showed it to me a week ago."

"What was the date of it?"

"November 17th, 189—"

"This one is dated December 17th."

"It was evidently made out one month after the other will."

"Where did he keep the will you saw?"

"In his safe."

"Well, it wasn't among the books and papers I found on the floor."

"Then he must have destroyed it, and left this one in its stead."

"We will find out more about that later."

"What in the world am I to do?"

"Nothing. Remain in this house till I tell you to leave it. I suspect treachery here. There is, I fear, a deep plot afoot to do you out of your inheritance. But rely on me, I'll stand by you and try to have your interests protected. Say nothing of this to any one."

"God bless you, sir," she replied gratefully, "I'll remember your kindness."

"Call the cook and butler here."

The girl obeyed.

Old King Brady then asked them:

"Did either of you know the contents of Mr. Ranger's will, when you witnessed it?"

"Not I," replied James, shaking his head.

"Nor I," said Mary Ann.

"Are these your signatures?"

He handed them the will and they eyed the names.

"Yes, sir, I wrote that name," said James.

"An' I wrote this wan," added the cook.

"You are sure?"

"Yessir."

"Sure I'd swear to mine."

"That will do. You may go."

Both walked away.

Old King Brady then joined Harry.

There were no new developments, and the day passed and night fell.

When the coroner arrived and examined the corpse he said to the detectives:

"He died of a fracture at the base of the skull."

"Did he receive more than one blow?" asked the old detective.

"No, not that I can see now."

"In that case, Harry, the blow that killed him may have been the one he received from the man in the steel mask, which he told us about. He may have been mortally injured when he was talking to me, but did not know it. He probably didn't feel the effect of the blow till he went to bed. There he probably died from the effect of it. If such is the case Fred Woods is innocent of having struck him. I'm sorry the young man ran away. We could now prove his innocence."

"He may come back," suggested Harry, hopefully.

"It's doubtful. The poor fellow will remain in hiding now, supposing himself a fugitive from the law. I'm sorry for him."

"He's bound to write to his girl sooner or later," said the boy. "Let's tell her our theory. She can then notify him if he writes to her."

"All right. Speak to her yourself."

Harry found Daisy in the parlor and explained his theory.

It delighted her. She felt that a heavy burden had been lifted from her shoulders, for she hated to believe Fred Woods was the guilty party.

Toward eight o'clock there came a ring at the front door bell.

James admitted a man.

He was a tall person of forty, dressed in black, and had a thin, narrow face.

"My card," said he with a gesture of great importance. "My name is Philip Murdock. I'm a lawyer. I represent Andrew Blake. He was Mr. Ranger's stepbrother. Read of the murder in the evening paper. Am here to look after my client's interests. Who is in charge here?"

The Bradys eyed him narrowly.

"Ah!" muttered the old detective, his eyes gleaming. "I expected a claimant for the dead man's fortune, but none so quick as this."

"What is going on?" whispered Harry curiously. "A game?"

"It looks as if one was developing. Those opposed to Daisy Dean are losing no time putting in their claim."

"Mr. Brady," exclaimed James.

"Well?"

"I think you had better talk to this gentleman, sir."

"Certainly, James."

"Who is this man?" asked the lawyer.

"The detective sir, who has full charge here."

"Oh, I see. Glad to meet you, Mr. Brady. My name is Murdock."

"So I heard," replied the detective quietly. "You represent Mr. Blake."

"Exactly so, sir, exactly so."

"I see you have made great haste to come here."

"Hem! yes. Quite necessary, the way matters stand here. My client is the only heir, you know. Was there a will?"

"Yes. I found one in Blake's favor, but I have proof that there was another one in existence. I therefore mean to hang on to this one till the other is found, Mr. Murdock."

"But I insist upon it being filed with the surrogate."

"I don't care what you insist upon. I'll do as I see fit. I've told you my plan, and I'll stick to it. If you don't like it, you can lump it."

"But, sir—but, sir," sputtered the lawyer, angrily.

"See here," said Old King Brady, looking him straight in the eye. "Do you mean to fight me by law?"

"Yes, sir!" declared Murdock in emphatic tones.

"Very well! Go ahead! I'm ready for you."

"I want to see that will."

"Well, I won't show it to you."

"But I demand it."

"You can go to the deuce! I want you to understand that this house and all it contains are in the hands of the police. We don't want you here, so you had better get out. James, show this man the door."

"But sir—confound your impudence, sir, I—I—I—" roared the lawyer.

Before he could say another word, however, James had him by the arm, and firmly pushed him out of the house.

They heard him snort, rave and swear a moment in the vestibule.

He then went away.

Old King Brady gave the officer on guard some instructions.

He then turned hurriedly to Harry, and said:

"Come on. I'm going to shadow him. I want to see this Mr. Blake. Doubtless he is waiting for the lawyer. Murdock may lead us to him."

"There's roguery in this case as sure as fate," thought the young detective. "Old King Brady suspects some crooked work here."

They left the house.

Murdock was not far ahead of them.

They tracked him to the city without discovery.

The lawyer made his way downtown.

At that late hour, Nassau street was almost deserted.

Going into the doorway of a dingy little building, Mr. Murdock ascended several rickety flights of dark stairs and reached his office.

Both detectives, as silent as phantoms, were at his heels.

When he went into his musty little old-fashioned office, they were in the dark hall outside the door with eyes and ears alert.

"Well," demanded a voice in the office, "how did you make out, Murdock?"

"Badly," they heard the lawyer growl. "Your stepbrother is dead, sure enough; murdered they say. Left a will too. It's in your favor. A detective got it. He won't file it with the surrogate. Therefore you may have trouble to get your brother's fortune. May have to fight for it in court."

The lawyer's companion began to swear.

"He must be Andrew Blake," whispered Young King Brady.

"Of course," assented the old detective. "I've balked him."

Presently they heard Blake demand savagely:

"What's the detective interfering for?"

Says there was another will. He won't give up this one till the other is found."

"In favor of that girl Daisy, I suppose?"

"Can't say. He didn't mention in whose favor it was."

"How soon can you have some news for me?"

"Don't know yet. Call in to-morrow or next day."

"All right. I'm going. Fight hard. There's a big fee in this for you."

The Bradys crouched back in the darkest shadows.

A moment later the door opened, a glare of light shot into the dark hall, a man stepped out, and the door closed again.

The Bradys only had a glimpse of Blake.

He was a large man, enveloped in a heavy pea-jacket, the collar of which was turned up, and he wore a slouched hat, the brim of which was pulled down over his face, concealing it.

Down the stairs he went, the detectives gliding after him.

"We'll see where he is stopping," whispered Old King Brady.

Blake headed down Fulton street to the ferry.

At Front street he turned to the left, crossed over to the fish market, and went out on one of the docks.

He paused on the string-piece at the end of the pier.

Then he vented a low whistle.

A skiff containing two men darted out from under the dock.

"Hurry up, boys!" the detectives heard him say. "Pull over to the piles."

The boat floated broadside against the slimy logs.

Seizing a rope, Blake slid down into the skiff.

"Give away!" he exclaimed.

The boat darted out upon the river.

"He has given us the slip," muttered Harry in disgust.

"Not yet," replied Old King Brady. "See, here comes a police boat. I'll hail it. We may find out yet what Blake's strange action means."

CHAPTER V.

AFTER THE RIVER THIEVES.

The two detectives were amazed at the singular manner in which Andrew Blake acted after leaving his lawyer's office.

It aroused their curiosity and made them suspicious of him.

The boat Old King Brady had seen was a long skiff containing several river policemen, and they had just come around the end of the pier.

Many of these boats patrol the water front at night.

They were the harbor police for whom the Bradys were to work.

"Ahoy there!" shouted the old detective, in guarded tones.

A bull's-eye lantern was flashed up at him from the skiff.

"What do you want?" was the gruff reply.

"Come over here—quick! We are detectives. We wish to board your boat."

"Oh!" was the answer. "Chasing any one?"

The boat glided close to the wharf, and Harry answered:

"Yes. We are after the men in the boat who just left this dock."

"Are you ward men?"

"No. Old and Young King Brady of the Secret Service."

"Oh! We were told to expect you from any point. Come aboard."

Going down the same rope Blake used, the Bradys embarked.

There were three uniformed policemen in the boat. Two were rowing and one sat steering in the stern. It was the latter who held the lantern.

"Douse that light!" said Old King Brady, hurriedly. "I don't want our quarry to see it. They mustn't know we are tracking them."

"Are they river thieves?" demanded the captain of the skiff.

"No. But we are suspicious of them," said Harry.

"Which way did they go? We didn't see them."

"Straight out into the river."

"Pull away," said the captain.

He steered the skiff out upon the dark, lumpy water.

There was a strong ebb tide, making rowing very hard.

Along each shore gleamed strings of bulkhead lights, and high in the air spread the arch of the big bridge lamps.

Few ships were passing, and such ferryboats as glided over the stream shed the reflection of their cabin-lamps on the murky tide.

Overhead the sky was wrapped in gloom.

The only sound that broke the silence was the rippling of the water and the creaking of the forest of masts and tangle of rigging on the countless ships swinging at their moorings at the docks.

Both detectives scanned the water sharply in all directions. They could not see anything of Blake's boat.

"Were they heading up stream, or down?" asked the captain presently.

"Neither way; straight across the river," Harry answeded.

"Up oars!" exclaimed the policemen. "Here's a chance to locate them. Just cast your eyes toward yonder ferryboat hugging the Brooklyn shore. If that rowboat gets between us and the ferryboat's cabin lights we will detect it, in a few minutes."

Every man watched.

They followed the slowly gliding boat with their glances.

No good came of it, however.

"She isn't out there," said Harry, at length.

"I guess she doubled on her course," said the captain grimly. "I'll turn down stream a bit, and see if we can find her."

The boat swung around.

It was hard pulling against the tide and one of the policemen said:

"Better run in near shore, cap., the tide ain't so strong over there."

"I'm satisfied."

Once the boat was off the ends of the wharfs, it rode easier.

They had not gone a cable's length, though, when there suddenly sounded the report of a pistol on a nearby schooner's deck.

"Help! Murder! Thieves!" roared a deep, husky voice.

"Trouble!" exclaimed Old King Brady in startled tones.

"River thieves robbing that boat, I'll bet," answered the captain.

Bang! Bang! Bang! came three more shots in quick succession.

This time the reports came from down upon the water.

By the spiteful blaze of each shot, the officers saw that they were being discharged by a man in a rowboat.

As Old King Brady's skiff swung around the end of a long pier, he dimly saw several men rush across the deck of the schooner.

Alongside rocked the rowboat from whence the shots came.

This was shown by the starboard light.

Several rough-looking men were in the boat, and another one, chased by the sailors on deck, rushed to the bulwarks and sprang over.

He landed squarely in the rowboat.

This made it rock dangerously, but it did not capsize.

"Go—quick," he panted, "or they'll catch us."

"Have you got the swag?" asked one of his friends.

"Yes—the whole crew's pay—in the canvas bag!"

The rascals rowed swiftly away.

All the sailors on the schooner were excited.

"Help! Help!" they yelled frantically.

"Thieves, sure enough," said Old King Brady, drawing his revolver.

"After them, boys!" cried the captain of the police boat.

Away dashed the long white skiff in hot pursuit of the fugitives.

Harry rose in the bow, gripping his pistol in his hand.

"Boat ahoy!" he shouted. "Haul to, there!"

A moment's silence followed.

Then the thieves flashed a light back.

Its powerful reflector showed the officers' uniforms.

"The harbor-police!" they heard the rascals exclaim. "Row faster!"

Four men were at the oars in the fugitives' boat. They pulled with desperate energy. The stout oar blades fairly bent under the strain.

It was a race for liberty—perhaps, for life.

"If you don't stop, I'll fire!" cried Harry, again.

The captain was keeping his bull's-eye turned full upon them. It disclosed their location as plainly as if by daylight.

For a few moments the thieves gained.

Unluckily for them, though, one of the men dropped an oar.

That crippled them; and the strong current swept their boat around.

Dashing on like a race horse, under the policemen's powerful strokes, Old King Brady's boat swiftly overhauled them.

In a few moments only a few yards separated the skiffs.

At this juncture another rowboat darted out of the gloom.

It was heading straight for the gunwale of the police boat.

"They are going to run us down!" exclaimed Old King Brady. He pointed at the dim outline of the coming boat.

Seeing their danger, one of the policemen shouted:

"Hey! Keep off there!"

No reply came back.

Whether by design or accident, the oncoming boat hit the police skiff squarely amidships, and knocked it over.

Every one was hurled into the river.

The bow of the colliding skiff was somewhat crushed, but not enough to prevent it keeping on its way.

Not one of the occupants of the boat was injured.

They were all expert swimmers.

Old King Brady and Harry struck out for the nearest of the officers. They seemed to be anxious to get away as fast as possible.

It was probable they feared arrest for their blunder.

Old King Brady caught view of them just as the boats collided.

Although it was a side glance at one of them, he instantly recognized the muffled-up figure of Andrew Blake!

The old detective was in great danger.

He did not know how to swim!

As soon as he struck the water, he cried:

"Harry! Help me!"

The next moment the dark waters closed over his head.

Down he sank like a stone.

Harry was a powerful swimmer and knew of his partner's failing. He therefore kept watch for Old King Brady.

Up rose the old detective, and the boy seized him and held his head above water.

"Don't get panic-stricken!" gasped Harry warningly.

"No danger," sputtered the old detective. "Where's the boat?"

"Behind you?"

"Are the policemen safe?"

"They're all swimming like fishes."

"Good! Can you hold me up?"

"Easily, as long as you don't struggle and handicap me."

"I'll keep quiet."

"The police are turning the boat over now."

It was no easy task to right the capsized skiff while they were swimming; but the officers finally succeeded. Then one of them got into it.

He bailed it out with his helmet.

This done, he helped the others into the skiff.

Meantime the river thieves and the boat that struck them disappeared.

Old King Brady was the first man hauled into the boat, and he was lucky enough to pick up one of the drifting oars.

Every one was drenched to the skin, and furious over their defeat.

"They've escaped," said Old King Brady. "What's the use of kicking."

"It looked to me," the captain grumbled, "as if the men in that second boat were aiding the rascals to escape."

"They were the fellows we were after," said the old detective.

"Do you know if they are friends of the Red Hook Band?"

"Can't say," answered Old King Brady. "The collision might have been an accident. It's very dark you know. They may not have noticed us, as the oarsmen had their backs turned in coming toward us."

"You know the black name Andrew Blake has got," suggested Harry. "He may not be any too good for this kind of work."

"I'd like to know that he is in league with these thieves," said the elderly detective. "If I could prove it, I'd soon end his fight for his stepbrother's fortune."

"How are we going to manage the boat?" asked one of

"I've got an oar. We'll have to use it to paddle back to shore."

The policemen grumbled at their misfortune in no mild terms.

One of them took the oar.

It was a hard job to paddle the boat across that tide, and they were swept far from the spot before they made a landing.

"We are going ashore here to get dried out," said Old King Brady as he and Harry climbed up on the dock the boat ran into.

"Coming back?" laughed the captain.

"Not to-night. I want to get a line on those thieves on and if I can."

"Very well. We and our whole fleet of boats are at your order any time you want us."

"Thanks. I'll be with you again soon, perhaps."

CHAPTER VI.

SOME CLEWS.

Upon reaching the street Old King Brady said to Harry:

"I wish we could notify all the policemen patrolling the river front to keep a lookout for any suspicious people who may land in a boat on any of the docks anywhere from Harlem to the Battery."

"That can easily be done," replied the boy quickly.

"How?"

"Go to a signal-box. Call up the nearest station house on the 'phone. Tell our story to the captain or sergeant. Ask him to notify all the precincts. As the different patrolmen have to call up their stations at certain hours, they'll get their orders to watch out for our thieves."

"Good! The simplest thing in the world. I'll do it."

Old King Brady was pleased at the suggestion.

He considered Harry a very clever fellow.

It was always Young King Brady's desire to excel the old detective, even if he was only looked upon as a pupil of Old King Brady.

They soon found a police signal-box and sent their warning.

"As we don't know where those fellows will land," said the police officer," we can't be on the watch at all points along the river at the same moment. This new signal system is therefore a good one for us."

"Let's go down to the schooner the thieves robbed," said Harry.

"Very well, it's quite near here. Come along, we may get a line on them there."

"I heard one of the villains say they stole the sailors' pay money."

"We'll soon learn if they got anything else."

They hurried down the street.

Harry was thinking of the Ranger murder case.

Several things about it puzzled his mind, and he asked:

"Why did you seize Mr. Ranger's will?"

"Because I want to have it privately examined."

"By whom?"

"Handwriting experts."

"Do you think it's a forgery?"

"I have my suspicions about it."

"But James and the cook identified their own signatures."

"Very true. But a clever forger wouldn't have the slightest trouble to imitate such writing as theirs. Mr. Ranger's signature looks genuine to me on that paper, too, but it may not be."

"Have you any of his writing to compare with it?"

"I have those papers I picked up from his bedroom floor. It will be very easy to get duplicates of James' and Mary Ann's handwriting."

"Why do you think this will is a forgery?"

"Because Mr. Ranger told me he had left his fortune to Daisy Dean. The girl herself saw his will, and saw that it was in her favor. In spite of this proof, the only will we could find is the one in Blake's favor."

"That's true. How much does the Ranger fortune amount to?"

"Two million dollars."

Harry whistled. The figures were startling.

Then he asked:

"How is it invested?"

"In stocks, bonds and mortgages."

"Ranger was a very rich man."

"Well, his fortune was big enough to excite the cupidity of a man like Blake. That rascal will fight hard to wrest it from the girl. But we must work to save that great fortune for Daisy Dean."

"If the will is a forgery, Blake must have uttered it."

"Just so. He's a bad man. See how quick he got a lawyer to make his claim, after reading of his stepbrother's death in the newspaper. That shows what a mean, grasping man he is. He might at least have had the decency to wait till Mr. Ranger was buried."

"Money makes a villain of many a man, Old King Brady."

"Well," said the old detective in a thoughtful way, as he bit a piece off a plug of tobacco and chewed it up, "I'm going to have the handwriting of this will tested, as I told you, before I'll give it up for probate. In the meantime we must try to find the missing will Daisy said she had seen."

"It's a pity lawyer Harper is dead. Had he been living now we could easily prove if this will was genuine by showing to him."

"True. And it's a pity Fred Woods is missing. He could perhaps tell us what caused Mr. Ranger's death."

By this time they reached the pier they were looking for.

The schooner was the only craft tied up there. A number of the crew were on her deck, excitedly talking about the robbery.

Among them was the policeman on that post. He had been called to the spot by the yells and pistol shots.

Old King Brady and the boy made their way to the vessel's deck.

The mate met them, and said roughly:

"No admittance here!"

"We are here to help you," said Harry, showing his badge.

"Oh—you're a couple of fly-cops, eh?"

"We were in the skiff with the harbor policemen who chased the thieves."

"Ha! Good for you," was the eager reply. "Did you overhaul them?"

"No. They escaped us. Another boat accidentally ran us down and capsized us."

"Thunder! Is that so?" was the disappointed reply.

"What did they steal?"

"A canvas bag holding $250."

"The crew's pay?"

"Ay; ten men for two months."

"Who is the loser—the owner or the crew?"

"Owner, I reckon, as the men hadn't been paid off yet?"

"Did the thieves get anything else?"

"Nothing."

"Can you describe the looks of the thieves to us?"

"Not their faces. They all wore black masks."

"Was there anything peculiar in the looks, manner or speech of the rascals?"

The mate pondered a moment. He wanted to be accurate. It was plain that a good description might lead to the capture of the river pirates. Then there would be a chance to recover the stolen money.

"I only heard one man speak," he said after a moment's thought. "He had a deep bass voice and a heavy cough. I think from his lingo he was a Dutchman. He spoke in broken English what little I heard him say. The rest of the gang were silent. One of the two who came aboard was short, thickset and limped a little, as if he had something the matter with either his foot or his leg."

"Well, what else?"

"That's all I can tell you. Just see how dark it is. The only light I had was that faint glow from the cabin windows and the dull port lights."

"I'll remember what you said when I'm hunting for them."

"Do you think you can get back the money?"

"I'm going to try."

"That's some relief, anyway."

"How was the robbery committed?"

"While the crew were down below, I was dozing in the cabin. The villains must have been watching our craft today, and seen the paymaster come aboard with the money. I had it in the captain's locker. The first thing I knew about them being aboard, was by awakening and finding the two men in the cabin. One was holding me up with his gun, while the other ransacked the cabin and got the money. I fired when they started to escape."

"Hit any of them?"

"Yes, I wounded the man who limped. But he got back into his boat first. The other jumped for it."

"We saw him escaping."

"Do you know who they are?"

"Only this much—that they are some of the Red Hook Band!"

While Old King Brady was talking to the mate Harry was questioning the rest of the crew, but got no further clews.

The two detectives then left the schooner, and went to a nearby saloon where they dried their wet clothing. Then they left the place.

Upon reaching the street Old King Brady said:

"These thieves are about the slickest articles I've ever been after. They cover their tracks beautifully. We'll never get on their tracks by watching the river. Our lay is on the land."

"Have you decided what to do?" asked Harry.

"Yes. I figure it out this way. If those fellows get a big wad of money they'll spend it as soon as possible where they can get the most pleasure out of it."

"In saloons?"

"More likely in concert halls."

"Then those are the places for us to pipe off."

"Of course. We can easily disguise ourselves and get acquainted around the places frequented by sailors and river men. It will not be hard to find out if any of the patrons are spending more money than usual. Any men we find reckless with their money will bear watching."

Harry liked this plan.

It was a favorite method employed by the police department.

They called in at several of the all-night drinking resorts without learning anything of value and then called up the nearest police station from a signal box, to which they had keys.

None of the policemen on duty along the river had seen any suspicious people coming in from the wharves, except the officer who was stationed down at Pier 1 East River.

He reported several men having debarked from a row boat and had seen them heading for the drinking saloon at the foot of West street.

One of these men had a limping gait.

The moment Old King Brady heard this, he said to Harry:

"That seems to be one of our birds."

"I have no doubt of it. Make a change in this dark hall way so they won't know us and we'll try to locate them."

The Bradys were experts at disguising.

On their persons they carried the means of changing to various characters.

In the gloomy hall they made such a rapid and great change in their looks as to be absolutely startling.

They emerged looking like a pair of sailors in seedy nautical costumes.

Old King Brady's face was hidden in a bristly tawny brown beard, a mop of reddish hair covered his iron gray locks, and he had a patch over his eye.

Harry had every look of a tough roustabout.

He wore a small mustache, his hands and face were smeared with soot, and he seemed to be half tipsy.

Once these detectives assumed a character, they never left it until the proper time came.

"Are you ready, Harry?" asked the old detective in a whisper.

"Ready for anything, Old King Brady," replied the boy. "Come on."

And, linked arm in arm, they went reeling across the street singing a sea song.

CHAPTER VII.

A FREE FIGHT.

The two detectives went into several saloons, and while pretending to be very drunk they keenly sized up the people in the resorts.

It was a very easy matter for their trained minds to tell the difference between honest men and habitual criminals.

Usually there is something about the features and actions of law breakers which stamps them what they are and detectives are quick to notice it.

The Bradys were no exception to the rule.

Nothing startling occurred until they presently heard a band of music.

It came from a concert hall near the Battery, and mingled with the popular tune being sung by a performer was much loud talking and laughing.

"Let's try this place," whispered Old King Brady.

"We'll see a big bunch of sailors here," Harry answered, as they went up a flight of creaking stairs.

Through an open door they saw a room filled with smoke.

An odor of liquor and beer mingled with the smoke and almost made the officers sick. But they passed inside.

Tables and chairs upon the floor were occupied by a densely packed crowd of sea-going men. Most of them were smoking, talking and drinking.

At the end of the room was a small stage. There was a singer upon it doing a "turn" to which the audience paid but little attention.

Waiters were darting about supplying the audience with drinks.

There was a raised alcove next the stage and the Bradys headed for it.

They were noisy and boisterous on purpose to attract attention, and as they reeled down the centre aisle, Harry was roaring in maudlin tones:

"You stick to the ship, lads, I'll save your lives.
I've no one to love me, you've children and wives——"

"Shut up!" yelled one of the tough waiters.

"Go on!" retorted Harry, glaring at him. "What's eatin' you, cully?"

"Order, gents, order," exclaimed another waiter.

"Waal, now, we'll order if you gives us time," growled Old King Brady.

"Ah—dry up and sit down."

"Can't find no berth," said the old detective.

"This way—this way, gents," cried another waiter, beckoning with his finger.

"Heave ahead, my hearty," said Harry. "We wants two seats—see!"

As they were standing up in the middle of the room every one saw them.

One of the waiters rushed up and grabbed them.

"This way, gents," he exclaimed. "Reserved seats this way. Come on and I'll introduce you to the great baritone, Signor McClosky."

And he rushed them up front, and into the alcove.

Here they were seated at a table.

This was just what they wanted.

It was a good place to see every face in the noisy audience.

The musicians banged and thumped, and the waiter wiped off the table.

"What'll you have, gents?" he roared at them.

"Be yer goin' ter splice ther main brace?" asked Old King Brady huskily.

"Ay, now," Harry answered. "I wants some booze, ole feller."

"Two whiskies," yelled the waiter. Then he shoved a couple of tough looking song-and-dance men over to the table, and added, "Two friends of mine. What's yours—bottle of champagne?"

"Belay thar!" roared Old King Brady, banging the table with his fists, "none o' yer flim-flam game here, messmate."

"Ain't you treatin'?" asked the waiter in injured tones.

"Who?"

"Why, these two gents?"

"Not on yer life!"

"Ah—say—come now——"

"Haul to now, yer lubber, or blow me if I don't foul yer main riggin'——"

"No offense, gents—no offense. I thought yer had money."

"An' I reckon yer takes us fer paupers, hey?"

"I'll bet you ain't got a ten-spot in your clothes."

"What!" roared Old King Brady, as if insulted at the remark, and he pulled a handful of bills from his pocket, waved them in the air and demanded angrily, "What d'ye call that yer leetle swab?"

"Oh," said the waiter in pleased tones. "That's the stuff. You're scared to spend it."

"I ain't!" exclaimed the detective. "Thar's three years pay on a whaler in that flipper, blast yer hide, an' I'm a spender, I am. Bring your friends two beers if they wants a drink, an——"

But the waiter was disgusted at his generosity.

"I never saw such mean guys in my life!" he growled. "I thought I had a couple of live ones on my staff, but I'm blest if they'll blow themselves stronger than a couple of beers."

"Give us those two drinks!" insisted the two actors.

And the disgusted waiter went away to get them.

Old King Brady had a deep purpose in what he did.

While he was attracting everybody's attention toward his money Harry was sizing up the audience.

He noted the eager looks of interest on many of the hard-looking faces in the room, and he quickly came to the conclusion that they wanted that money.

"A pretty tough gang," he thought. "A good many look like bunco-steerers, gamblers, bank sneaks and confidence sharps. I'm surprised to see them down here below the dead line."

He referred to an imaginary line.

It was drawn across Manhattan Island first by Chief Byrnes for the benefit of the burglars, pickpockets and sharpers.

This line once crossed at Fulton street.

All the crooked gentry were warned that if they were caught below it they would be promptly locked up.

This was done for the better protection of the jewelers, bankers, brokers and other dealers in valuables downtown.

Harry's surprise was, therefore, justified.

Keeping his eyes open, he tried to locate the man with a limp among those who came in and went out.

In this he did not succeed.

A new tactic was tried.

They got rid of the actors and began ordering drinks at a lively rate. And these drinks were dextrously emptied into a cuspidor under the table.

All the while they pretended to get drunker.

Both detectives soon perceived that several of the men in the room were narrowly watching them and conversing together.

It was soon plain to the officers that half a dozen of these watchers were acquainted with each other.

Their faces were not familiar to the detectives.

"Harry," finally whispered Old King Brady.

"Well?"

"I've got some birds spotted."

"So have I. You mean those watching us."

"Just so. Shall we try them?"

"By all means."

"Watch out for trouble now."

"I'm ready."

Old King Brady rose and staggered away.

One of the waiters seized him.

"What! going so soon, gents?" he demanded.

"Ay, ay! Get out o' my way."

"Wait. Have one more ball with me"

"No, sir. Avast thar."

"But you must."

"Goin' ter le' me go? I'll hit yer if yer don't!"

"No. Not till you——"

Bang!

Old King Brady's fist caught the waiter in the eye.

It knocked him down.

He designed to bleed the detectives more, but was foiled.

"Ouch! Help!" he yelled.

Half a dozen waiters made a rush for the detectives. They intended to wipe up the floor with our friends and then throw them into the street.

But they were stacking up against a tough game.

They didn't have two tipsy sailors to deal with.

Both detectives seized their chairs and in a moment the place was in a perfect uproar.

The singer on the stage rushed off into the wings, the musicians stopped playing and dodged behind the rear drop curtain, and every man in the audience sprang to his feet.

A babel of excited comments rang out.

"Stand back thar!" roared Old King Brady, swinging the chair aloft. "Ther fust lubber wot comes in reach gits his figgerhead stove in!"

"Down him!" yelled the waiter the detective hit.

He scrambled to his feet.

Some of the waiters seized the empty beer bottles and glasses from the tables and hurled them at the two undaunted officers.

Whiz! came the flying shower.

The Bradys dodged them as best they could.

Some of the missiles struck their bodies but missed their heads.

Never minding the few thumps they got, the detectives made a rush for the gang of waiters and swung the chairs around.

Smash—bang—thump!

As the furniture hit the white-aproned swindlers they went down right and left, and the spectators made a rush for the exit.

They didn't wish to get hit.

"Pitch in!" roared Old King Brady. "Scuttle ther lubbers."

Swish—bang! went Harry's chair and down went a man.

The rest weakened. Then they, too, dashed for the exit.

"Watch the gang!" whispered Harry, hurriedly.

"Do you see anything?"

"Yes. A lame man! Look!"

He pointed out one of the fugitives.

This person was a heavy, rough fellow with strips of court plaster on his face.

"Isn't that a wound on his cheek?" asked Old King Brady.

"It's a fresh injury."

"Made by a bullet fired by the mate of the Nancy Jane."

"He said he wounded the lame man."

"After him, Harry. Don't lose track of him, boy."

They were charging on the door during this hurried dialogue.

As the last of the crowd surged down the stairs the waiters fled into an ante-room, with all the fight knocked out of them.

Down to the street surged the crowd.

Here they surrounded the Bradys.

"Good, lads," said one, patting Harry on the back. "You licked them for fair."

The man who spoke was the lame fellow they were watching.

Here was a chance to get acquainted with him.

CHAPTER VIII.

CAPTURING A SUSPECT.

"What did the waiters do to you?"

"Did they beat you out of your money?"

"Say! Who started the fight?"

"How did you happen to hit them?"

A volley of questions like these were shot at the detectives.

They knew they had the sympathy of the decent sailors in the crowd.

Old King Brady laughed and took a fresh chew of tobacco.

"Waal, blast my timbers if we didn't keel-haul 'em well," he chuckled.

"It wuz de greatest scrap I ever put up agin a mug," added Harry, boastfully.

"We wouldn't a let 'em hurt you, if they'd got the upper-hand," declared the man with court plaster on his face. "Would we, boys?"

This appeal was made to the crowd.

His pals took the cue.

"No! No! No!" they chorused.

"We always stand by shipmates in distress, don't we?" he continued.

"Ay now, that we do."

"You see, we are your friends."

"Put it there," said Old King Brady, shaking hands with him.

"Which way are you going?"

"Up to pier 3 North River."

"Well, I'm going your way, so come along," said the lame man, giving his friends a significant wink. "There's no telling but what those bums might follow you and play you a mean trick. If they do, count on me."

"Ay, ay, my hearty, an' it's werry good o' you, ter be sure. Come on, shipmate."

And, linking arms with the two, the fellow led them away.

The crowd dispersed.

When the Bradys had gone some distance ahead, though, the friends of the lame man began to quietly dog their footsteps.

It was not long before the detectives became aware of it.

Pier 3 was not far away and they soon reached it.

They crossed the street to the dock.

The outer end of it was covered. Huge piles of freight littered the uncovered part.

As they reached a stack of casks the man who held the detectives' arms whistled.

It was a signal to his companions.

They were men of quick action. Indeed, their business made them act promptly.

Darting toward the detectives at full speed, they soon arrived close behind them.

The lame man tightened his grip on their arms. His object was to render them defenseless by holding an arm of each man.

But the Bradys saw through his game.

Without saying a word, Old King Brady hauled off his free fist and drove it against the chin of the rascal with the force of a pile driver.

Only one blow was enough.

It dropped him like a log.

Around spun the detectives.

By the time they confronted the gang they had their revolvers in their hands and the deadly weapons stared the startled villains in the face.

They suddenly paused.

Up went their hands.

Exclamations escaped them.

"Halt!"

It was Old King Brady who spoke.

The men stood irresolute. They did not know what to do. Not one carried a weapon more dangerous than a club in his hand.

"Well?" demanded the detective.

"We—were—coming—to—say—to—say—good night," stammered one of the gang.

"Oh! I see. Lor' bless yer heart, it was kind o' yer, my lads."

"Yes. Of course. We—we—are kind-hearted men."

"So's yer messmate lyin' here. In fack, my lads, he's so almighty kind-hearted it struck inward an' knocked him out."

"I reckon as he's got a bad case o' knock-out fever."

"Hadn't we better take him home?"

"Oh, no. We'll tend ter that. Guess yer'd better come along, too."

The foiled rascals exchanged uneasy glances.

It was evident that their design to rob Old King Brady of his big wad of money was a dead failure.

He had the drop on them and they knew it.

"Lower those guns," said the man, nervously.

"If youse lubbers don't line up thar an' march single file ahead o' me till we meets a cop I'm a-goin' ter drop a leaden pill inter yer hulks."

This threat scared them.

With the prison cell staring them in the face, they became reckless.

They turned and ran away.

Out on the pier they dashed at full speed.

There was no vessel moored there and the doors of the covered portion of the wharf were closed and locked.

"We've got them in a trap!" chuckled Old King Brady. "They can't very well reach the street now. They've got to remain on the pier till we get a police patrol wagon here with a platoon of reserves."

"I'll go and ring up a wagon," said Harry. "Can you hold them here?"

"Easily. Lose no time, though."

The boy dashed away to West street and vanished.

Old King Brady looked at the lame man. He was still senseless. The detective then glanced at the fugitives.

They were acting strangely.

One by one they dived from the pier into the water.

"Thunder!" exclaimed the old detective in amazement.

He never expected to see them try to escape in this manner. In fact, he was confident he had them cornered.

Whipping out a pair of handcuffs, he locked them on the lame man's ankles.

"I can leave him in safety now," he muttered. "He won't dare dive off if he comes to. I'll try to stop the other fellows."

Down the dock he rushed at full speed.

The last man had plunged into the river.

Swimming under the dock they disappeared like magic.

The detective watched patiently for them.

He was soon rewarded.

They came into view. But they were in a rowboat. It had probably been hidden under the pier. They rowed swiftly away.

"Baffled!" exclaimed Old King Brady, furiously.

Harry now came back.

"The wagon will be here soon," he reported. "Where are they?"

The old detective pointed down at the river.

"Gone!" he exclaimed.

"What! Escaped?"

"Without the least trouble."

"Confound it! Why didn't you fire at them?"

"Hadn't time."

"Well, anyway, we've got one of them."

"He can be pumped, too."

"The wagon will soon be here, as I said, and will carry him away."

"Good! Then we can put this man where he will be safe for awhile."

They did not have to wait long for the wagon. Before it arrived their prisoner regained his senses and sat up.

"Where am I?" he asked, vaguely.

"Safe," laughed Old King Brady.

"What's this on my ankle?" was the next bewildering question.

"A pair of bracelets."

The truth now began to dawn upon the prisoner's brain. He turned pale.

Finally he asked in nervous tones:

"Who are you, anyway, detectives?"

"Very likely."

"Then I'm done for!" despairingly cried the man.

"Badly beaten at your own game," dryly said Harry.

The man noticed their changed voices and missed their former dialect.

It made him feel very uneasy and he asked:

"Was this a job you put up on me?"

"Decidedly," answered Harry. "We want you for the robbery of the Nancy Jane. You've been watched since you landed from the river."

"There's been some treachery here," muttered the man.

"Where's that canvas bag containing the crew's money?"

"I ain't got it."

"Was it divided among the gang?"

"Oh, I ain't saying a word. I'm too fly for that."

"Perhaps we may make you speak when we've got you caged."

"Not much. I ain't going to convict myself. I'd be a fool to do that."

Harry smiled. He had often heard criminals make this remark. But he knew of a number of methods to make them weaken.

"Well," he remarked, "you may be a very smart, determined man, but you ain't a match for the Secret Service department. Before we get through with you we'll make you confess."

As the police patrol wagon drew up a swarm of officers alighted.

Surrounding the prisoner, the sergeant in charge asked:

"What's the matter here?"

"Take this man in," said Old King Brady, pointing at the river thief.

"Oh, you are the one who sent for us?"

"We are. The rest of the gang escaped in a boat."

"No trace of them?"

"No."

"Come on," said the sergeant to the prisoner.

Without ceremony he was yanked to his feet and flung in the wagon.

"Coming?" asked the officer of the detectives.

"Church street station?" asked Harry.

"Yes."

"It's useless to look for this man's friends now," said Old King Brady, "for before we could get a boat they'd be gone. The best thing we can do will be to secure this bird in his cage. He is bound to be useful to us."

They rode away with the prisoner.

In the station house he gave a fictitious name, age and address, of course, and then he was carefully searched.

Only a pistol and some money were found in his pocket.

The latter was a roll of ten dollar bills, with a paper binder pinned on.

Old King Brady looked it over.

On this binder was printed $250, and written below "For Nancy Jane's crew."

Here was a lucky stroke.

"Why," said Old King Brady in pleased tones, as he examined it. "That's the money stolen from the schooner and here's the written proof of it."

"Good enough," replied the sergeant. "I'm glad you recovered it so soon, gents, and it's bound now to get back

into the hands of its rightful owners within a very short space of time. Lock him up, boys."

CHAPTER IX.

THE DETECTIVES' STRANGE CALLER.

On the following morning the Bradys were in the parlor of their lodging house talking about the river thieves case.

It was a pleasant, sunny room, with curtained windows, a red carpet, a handsome mantel on which stood a large clock, and in the middle of the room there was a flat-top desk.

Harry sat at the desk writing some reports about their work. Old King Brady was pacing the floor, when there came a knock at the door.

"Come in," called Harry, laying down his pen, and glancing up.

The door opened and a policeman entered.

He was one of the officers who had been stationed at Mr. Ranger's house.

"Well, what brings you here?" asked Old King Brady.

"I've come to report to you by the chief's orders, sir," replied the policeman.

"Has anything new transpired?"

The coroner's jury gave the verdict. It was that Mr. Ranger was murdered by the blow on the head. The autopsy proved this. The coroner's physician didn't think the thump he got early in the evening did the damage. Evidence was found that Ranger was hit twice. The harmless whack was the one he got when forced to sign that paper. James told me of. The dangerous blow was the one that killed him. The evidence showed that he got struck the second time some hours after the light blow was delivered."

The Bradys exchanged glances of deep meaning.

"Well?" demanded the old detective.

"Miss Daisy received a permit to bury the murdered man and he is now in his tomb. The servants were discharged, and the house is to be locked up soon."

"Where are the servants going?"

"To New York. Here are their new addresses."

He handed Old King Brady a paper with writing on it.

"Are you going to remain at the Ranger residence long?"

"I'm to leave to-night."

"What is Miss Daisy going to do?"

"Remain alone in the house as long as what little money she has holds out. She don't know where she'll go after that."

"Tell her we'll keep track of her."

"Very well, sir."

"Anything else?"

"No, sir."

"Good day."

The policeman departed.

When he was gone, Harry said:

"It's a pity we haven't done anything for the girl yet."

"Don't get impatient," replied Old King Brady quietly. "I mean to aid her. The time isn't ripe yet. In piping Andrew Blake we got a start."

"It didn't amount to anything."

"But it will. I want you to go to this address to-day and get me copies of the signatures of James and Mary Ann."

"What do you want of them?"

"Show them to Professor Simms."

"I'll attend to it."

"There's a great fortune at stake in this case, Harry. We must save it for the girl. Our work will tell in the end."

"We'll have a hard fight for it. Blake is going to put up a stiff contest when he sees that will."

"Let him. It won't do him any good. There may be another will in the girl's favor hidden somewhere. If there is, we'll find it yet."

"May as well hunt for a needle in a haystack."

"Perhaps so. I'll do it though."

"Any report in at headquarters yet about Fred Woods?"

"No. The chief is to notify me when the young man is captured."

"He may be guilty after all."

"Everything points to him as the culprit."

"Any one looking for him?"

"The whole police force."

"He must be well hidden, then, as he hasn't yet been found."

Just then another knock was heard at the door.

"Enter," cried Old King Brady.

A man walked into the room and closed the door.

He stood with folded arms eyeing the two startled detectives.

It was the man in the steel mask.

He was attired exactly as he was when he attacked Mr. Ranger, and still wore the steel face covering.

Neither of the Bradys had ever seen him before.

They recognized him at once, though, by Mr. Ranger's description.

For a few monents there was a deep silence in the room.

Old King Brady then demanded:

"Well, sir, what do you want?"

"A few moments' talk with you," replied the steel mask, in low tones.

"Proceed."

"I suppose you know of me?"

"Yes. Mr. Ranger told us about your call on him. He said you knocked him senseless, and bound him in his chair. Then you forced him, at the point of a pistol, to put his signature to a paper, the contents of which he did not know."

"He told you the truth."

"It was a strange proceeding on your part."

"Not at all, if you understood my object."

"What was your object?"

"I decline to tell you, sir."

"Ah, then why do you wear that steel mask?"

"To conceal my face, for one thing."

"What else?"

"And because it is bullet-proof for another thing."

"Have you any reason to fear bullets?"

"Most decidedly. I have reason at this moment. You might shoot at me."

"Why should I?"

"Because you think I am concerned in Mr. Ranger's death. If you were to try to arrest me, I would certainly resist you. That would be a cause for you attempting to shoot at me. In that case, my head would be protected."

"Oh, I see."

"I did not come here looking for trouble though, Old King Brady."

"You have run your head into the lion's jaws."

"No, I haven't. I came here to aid you, for a reason best known to myself. If I thought you'd injure me, I wouldn't have taken the trouble to hunt up your name and address in a directory, and walk in here to get into trouble."

"Such an action on your part would be the height of folly."

"Certainly it would. I realize that. I'm no fool."

"What is your name?"

"I do not care to reveal my identity for certain reasons. At least not at present. You may know more about me some time in the future. Just now my identity don't interest you, except to appease your curiosity."

The Bradys were puzzled by the man's actions and talk.

Neither of them could fathom his purpose.

The only personal charge they could bring against him was that of a suspect in the Ranger murder mystery. The reason of this was given by the policeman who had just gone. By his report, this masked man was partially exonerated. The coroner's physician had performed an autopsy on the body. It showed that the blow the masked man dealt Mr. Ranger had merely stunned him. It was the second blow that killed him. Nobody knew who delivered that fatal blow. All the evidence thus far shown, seemed to indicate that Fred Woods was the guilty party. Woods had disappeared to escape arrest, however.

"Well," said Old King Brady, after a pause, during which the above ideas passed through his mind. "We will admit that curiosity prompts me now. But there are other reasons, too——"

"You suspect me of being mixed up in the Ranger murder, don't you?"

"Of course we do. That's why I said you have thrust your head into the lion's jaws, by venturing to come in here."

A smothered laugh escaped the masked man.

He seemed to feel pretty safe, they thought.

"Well," he remarked, "when I get through talking to you, I am going to change your opinion."

"You'll have a hard job to do it," interposed Young King Brady in decided tones. "We've got some strong evidence against you."

"Are you referring to my footprints in the soft ground outside the murdered man's library window?" asked the steel mask in amused tones.

"Yes, and the same marks outside the bedroom window, and in the room itself where the old merchant was found slain."

"Exactly. I am going to tell you how they got there. In the first place, I came up from the river, and when I got the paper signed, I returned to the river——"

"We have already learned that by tracking you."

"I expected to hear you say that. You therefore knew about my first call at the house. But you don't know about the second."

"Well, what about it?"

"I'm going to tell you now. It was midnight when I returned. Mr. Ranger's bedroom window was wide open. Angry voices came from the room. Two men were bitterly quarreling. They were Mr. Ranger and Fred Woods. I listened."

"I see," said Harry, with a nod. "What happened then?"

He was getting very much interested.

Old King Brady stood by, an interested spectator.

There were some sheets of paper on the desk before Harry, and he picked up his pen, and replied as he jotted down in shorthand all that was said:

"Go on, and I'll take down all you say."

"I want you to do that so I can swear to my confession," said the man in the steel mask, in fierce tones. "I'm terribly in earnest about this, I've got evidence. I was an eye-witness. I overheard all that was said. I crept over to the window and peered in. There sat Mr. Ranger on the edge of the bed. Woods stood before him, in a furious mood. 'Mr. Ranger, said he, you ruined my life. You have come between Daisy and me. Now, you have discharged me. I shall have revenge!' Mr. Ranger ordered him out, saying, 'If you don't get out, I'll summon the butler to throw you out!' He started to his feet as if to carry out his threat. Quick as a flash Woods struck him a fearful blow with a heavy cane he carried. The old merchant fell dead beside his bed. Woods rushed to the safe. 'There's money in here,' I heard him say! I need it. to get out of the country!' Then he pulled everything out of the safe and pocketed the money. The row had roused the family. I rushed into the room through the window to catch him. He aimed a pistol at me, and made me retreat. That's how my footprints were left on the carpet. Just as I got outside, he stooped over the corpse, I think he meant to hit the old man again. At this moment the butler entered. Woods then fled. Fearing I might be implicated I fled too."

"Are you willing to swear to these facts?" demanded Harry.

"Yes, I am!" was the emphatic reply of the masked man.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE TUNNEL.

The two detectives were astonished at the confession they had just heard.

It was such a plausible explanation of all that happened in Mr. Ranger's room, that it would have convineed any ordinary person.

But the Bradys were not ordinary mortals.

They did not accept as true everything they heard.

In fact, they preferred to doubt a story of the kind they listened to, until they were convinced it was not a lie.

There were various reasons for this, and Harry said:

"Of course it would be easy for you to manufacture a yarn like this to turn our suspieions from yourself."

"I admit the force of your reasoning," replied the masked man coolly.

"You may not be guilty. You may merely be an enemy of Woods, and for that reason may be trying to fasten the guilt on him out of revenge."

"A possibility, yes; but you are wrong again," answered the mysterious man.

"Now, see here."

"Well?"

"Why are you giving evidenee against Woods?"

"Simply to get justice for that horrible deed."

"I don't see how you can say that when you were no friend of Ranger's."

"True, I treated Ranger badly. With me it was only a matter of business to get his signature the way I did. I knew I couldn't get it any other way. I had no personal spite against the old man."

"One thing more."

"Name it."

"You will swear to this eonfession?"

"Certainly."

"How can you be put under oath without giving your name?"

The man was silent.

"What good is an anonymous affidavit?" proceeded Harry eurtly.

Still no reply from the man.

"Sueh an affidavit," said Harry in tones of contempt, "would not be worth the paper it was written upon, if we produeed it in eourt."

Finally the masked man said:

"I realize the foree of what you say. But it can be remedied."

"How?"

"I'll give you my name, under one eondition."

"Ah! You are giving this information with a string attached to it, so you can pull it away, in case we don't come to terms with you?"

"That's about the correet idea."

Harry shot a keen glanee at his partner.

It spoke volumes.

They could almost talk to each other with mere glanees, they understood each other so well.

"Now we are getting at the bottom of your call here," said Harry, curtly.

"Well, do you want me to make my information valuable by signing an affidavit?" asked the man in the steel mask.

"Yes. Name your conditions."

"That is business. You arrested a man last night, didn't you?"

"Yes, a river thief."

"Well, that man is a friend of mine."

"Yes."

"And I want him to have his liberty."

"Well."

"He will be diseharged if you fail to press the charge against him."

"True."

"Here's my offer. You promise to not eonviet my friend and I'll sign the affidavit by means of whieh you ean convict the murderer of Hiram Ranger."

The masked man's plan was out at last.

It surprised the detectives, but they did not show it.

Harry turned to Old King Brady.

"Shall we accept his offer?" he asked.

"By all means," answered the old detective, nodding.

"Very well. It's a go. I'll write the confession out in longhand. We don't need a notary to swear this man. We'll do it ourselves—eh?"

"To be sure we can. I'll aeeept his oath to me."

"Feteh that Bible here."

They then eaused the man to swear to his statement and he signed the name "John Clark."

When this was done the masked man asked, quietly:

"Am I at liberty to go?"

"You are," replied Old King Brady, politely. "But I'll shadow you," he added, mentally.

"Then my friend will be discharged?"

"So I presume if we don't appear against him."

"I'll trust to your honor."

"Thank you. Good morning."

They noticed that the masked man was nervously clutching two objects in the side pockets of his long coat, as he baeked out the door.

"Revolvers," thought Harry, deteeting his action at onee. "If we showed any treaehery he'd shoot us before we could pull a gun."

The moment the mysterious fellow was in the hall Old King Brady stepped into a closet, seized his hat, darted into the baek room and vanished.

The man in the mask had gone downstairs.

A cab was awaiting him at the eurb.

He turned up his coat collar, pulled his hat brim down over his eyes, held his handkerchief to his faee and passed out.

Old King Brady had got downstairs by means of a rear staircase, almost as soon as the stranger had, and through the basement window saw him enter the cab and drive swiftly away.

The old detective made a rapid change in his appearanee.

When he emerged from the basement door he looked very much like an Italian laborer, and he hastened after the cab.

He intended to shadow his caller.

A short distance from home he picked up a hack and got in, saying:

"Chase that cab ahead, at a respectable distance, and keep it in view without being seen. Can you do it?"

"Easily," replied his driver, as he received a five dollar bill in advance.

The hack started off in pursuit.

While this was going on Harry went to the residence of Mr. Ranger's cook and butler and procured copies of their signatures for Old King Brady.

The old detective was in hot pursuit of the masked man.

The cab went straight across town and headed for the Twenty-third street ferry.

Here the masked man alighted and paid the driver.

Old King Brady expected to see him board a ferryboat.

But he didn't.

He quickly passed behind a fence erected along the side of the ferry dock.

Alterations were being made at the northeast side of the slip and the fence had been put up to prevent people from falling into the water.

Just as the man vanished behind the fence Old King Brady alighted.

He rushed over to the opening in the fence and peered through.

The masked man had vanished.

Not a trace of him was to be seen.

"That's queer!" muttered the detective. "How could he disappear so quickly?"

He was puzzled.

Not to be baffled, he went through the opening and glanced around.

"There are only two ways in which he could have gone," he thought. "One was to have dived off the stringpiece into the river and the other was to have gone down under this pier and hidden among the piles."

It seemed as if the latter solution was the correct one.

Out in the slip floated numberless logs.

A dredge had been at work across the slip and floated there with its big iron bucket suspended in the air.

There were some freshly driven piles sticking up out of the water and a pile-driver beside them.

Had the man embarked in a rowboat he could not have gotten out of the slip before Old King Brady would have seen him.

To reach the pile-driver or the dredge by swimming would have taken equally as much time, and as there was no other place out on the water where the man could have hidden, he was forced to think the fellow was under the dock.

Old King Brady went along the stringpiece.

He was looking for a means of getting down under the dock.

Close to the opening in the fence was a pile with a number of rusty spikes driven in the side.

It formed a fairly good ladder.

The tide was low, but was rising.

Old King Brady climbed down on the spikes.

When almost at the water's top he paused.

From there he could see under the dock for some distance.

Back a few yards it was dark and gloomy.

A maze of timbers forming the frame of the dock confronted him and he got on top of a huge beam and crept in.

Most of the timbers around him were very dirty, he observed, but the one he was on was quite clean.

"This beam has been used as a creeping path," he mused. "It looks to me as if this place is in frequent use. It's an odd place for that masked fellow to stow himself. Still, it's in keeping with his queer looks. His interest in the river thief we arrested shows plainly that he's in league with the Red Hook Band. I suspected it at once. That's why I let him leave my lodging unmolested. I thought he'd lead me to the lair of his gang. It looks as if my surmise was correct, too."

He crept ahead and lit his lantern.

Its rays showed him that he was going shoreward.

When he reached the end of the beam, he found himself at the mouth of a tunnel looking very much like a disused sewer.

It was swarming with rats.

At high tide, the river flooded it.

As there was no other avenue ahead, he concluded that the man in the mask had gone up the tunnel.

It was now devoid of water.

Old King Brady plunged into it.

Going straight ahead for fifty yards, he noticed that the tunnel abruptly swung around to the right.

On this side of Twenty-third street were some very old vacant brick buildings.

The tunnel led straight toward one of them and he followed it.

A few yards further on and he saw the end of the tunnel.

It terminated in a flight of stone steps leading upward.

Up he went to an opening in the top covered by a trap door.

He masked his lantern, and cautiously raised the covering.

As his head went up through the opening in the gloom, he felt a pair of cold hands grasp him by the throat.

It was a deadly, strangling grip from which he could not get away.

CHAPTER XI.

THE THREATENING LETTER.

Acting upon Old King Brady's instructions, Harry took Mr. Ranger's will and the specimens of writing he procured from James and Mary Ann to the office of a handwriting expert, down Broadway, near Chambers street.

Entering a little front office, he saw a man at a desk.

He was a small, thin man with sharp features, and a gray beard.

The walls of the room were covered with charts, curious specimens of writing and magnified photographs of signatures and words.

"Hello, Professor Simms," said the boy. "Are you busy?"

"Why, Harry, is that you? I'm glad to see you;" said the old expert. "Sit down. No I'm not busy. What can I do for you to-day?"

Harry handed him the papers.

"This will is a forgery, we think," said he.

"Ah. Indeed."

"Mr. Ranger's signature can be found on these letters. Compare it with the signature on the will, and see if it's genuine."

The professor opened the will on his desk.

He then took one of the letters, and laid it beside the will.

The two signatures looked exactly alike.

But he was not satisfied with this, for he put the signatures under a powerful microscope, and intently examined them.

With delicate instruments he carefully measured each letter, and figured out the different curves and angles.

Fully half an hour passed in silence.

Then the professor glanced up and said:

"This signature is not a forgery."

"It isn't?" demanded Harry in surprise.

"No. It's genuine. I'd swear to it."

"Is it possible?"

"Beyond question."

"Show me how you arrived at that idea."

The professor gave the boy a glance through the glass, and pointed out the exact similarity of the two signatures.

When he finished, Young King Brady was convinced.

It disappointed him very much, though, and he said:

"What a pity! We were sure it was a forgery."

"It isn't," replied the professor. "You have seen for yourself."

"Yes, I'm convinced. Is it worth while comparing the signatures of the witnesses?"

"Most decidedly. Let me have the specimens."

Harry gave him the samples of James' and Mary Ann's writing, and the professor compared them with the names written on the will.

This time he only spent a few moments at it.

A curious look was upon his face as he glanced around.

"This is queer—very queer!" he exclaimed.

"What do you mean?" asked Harry.

"The signatures of the witnesses are a clumsy forgery of these samples."

Harry was startled and perplexed.

He could not understand this at all.

After a few moments' thought, he asked:

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"I got these samples from the originals of those names to-day."

"Well, this will was witnessed some time ago, according to the date."

"So I see. Would the witnesses' handwriting alter so much in that time?"

"No. Of course not. To the naked eye, the signatures on the will look like the originals. Under the microscope there is the greatest difference. Look."

Harry peered through the glass.

It astonished him to see how totally unlike the originals the names were that were written on the will, when they were magnified.

There was hardly any resemblance at all.

Every measurement the expert made showed a vast difference in the slopes, angles, shapes and sizes of the letters.

The originals were firmly written in a natural hand; the forgery showed trembling, uncertain lines.

"Do you want enlarged photographs of these names?" asked the professor.

"Yes, indeed. We may have to use them to show the court, if this will is contested."

"How about the other names?"

"The lawyer is dead, and the notary has disappeared."

"Then we can't examine their writing with examples?"

"No. This is an old case. The signature of the man who made the will is genuine; the signatures of the witnesses are forgeries."

"I can't understand that," laughed the professor. "Generally it is the other way in a case of this kind."

Harry felt disgusted.

Instead of clearing up the mystery, it became more complicated.

After some further talk with the expert, he left the place, thinking:

"I don't see what we can do for Daisy Dean, now."

Harry strolled over to headquarters, thinking over the strange events in which he and his partner had become involved.

The chief was in his office, and greeted the boy with a smile.

"I've got some good news for you. Harry," said he.

"What is it about, sir?"

"Your lame prisoner."

"Well?"

"Last night we put him through the 'third degree,' and forced him to confess."

The "third degree" he mentioned was a method employed by the Secret Service department, of playing upon a prisoner's fear.

By the most cunning plans they so work upon a prisoner's emotions that he frequently exposes his guilt or the guilt of others which he knows about.

The young detective laughed.

"Well, chief, what did you learn?" he asked.

"First, that this lame man really is one of the Red Hook Band."

"Yes."

"Second, that their captain is the man in the steel mask."

"Exactly what we thought."

"Is that so?"

"Oh, yes. He called on us and tried to get us to let the lame man go."

"You don't say!"

"Old King Brady is shadowing him now."

"Good!"

"Did you find out his name?"

"No. The prisoner says none of the gang knows it, and none has ever seen his face."

"Do you believe that?"

"No. I think he was lying."

"So do I, chief. Although the gang may not know his real name, it is perfectly ridiculous to suppose he always wears that steel mask. His face must have been seen at some period by his men. What else did you learn?"

"I tried to find out where the gang held out. The prisoner declared that they had no regular retreat. They haunt the various docks."

"But where do they dispose of the stolen property?"

"He claimed he didn't know. The man in the steel mask attends to that. He never lets the gang know anything about his business. He merely divides up the money realized. That's all they care about. They don't give a rap who their captain is, or where he gets rid of the stolen stuff, so long as they get their share of the money."

"Can you pump any more information out of him?"

"We are going to keep on trying."

"Once we get the gang located," said Harry, "we could make a raid on them, and scoop them all in."

"I hope Old King Brady will succeed in tracking the man in the mask to the den of the river thieves. If he does, we can carry out your wish."

At this moment the telephone bell rang.

The chief had a nickel-plated transmitter and receiver on his desk.

He turned in his chair, and answered the call, with:

"Hello! Hello! Who is that?"

"Daisy Ranger," was the reply.

"Ah! What can I do for you?"

"Is this the chief?"

"Yes."

"I want you to send the Bradys up to Mr. Ranger's house."

"What for?"

"I received a letter by mail to-day, threatening my life."

"Indeed. What does it say?"

"Listen. I'll read it to you."

"Very well. I'm ready.

"The letter is post-marked New York City. It has no date. Here is what it says:

"'Miss Ranger—Unless you quit this country within twenty-four hours, you will share your father's fate. Remember, we are terribly in earnest!"

"Is that all?" asked the chief.

"Yes, sir."

"Is it a man's or a woman's handwriting?"

"It looks like a man's writing."

"At what station was it posted?"

"Station D, at 5 o'clock yesterday evening."

"Don't let the threat alarm you."

"But I cannot help being frightened. I am alone in this house. What do you advise me to do?"

"Nothing. Remain where you are. I'll send the Bradys up to see you. They will arrange for your safety."

"Thank you, sir. I shall feel dreadfully worried until they get here. Please do not lose any time about sending them to me."

"Very well."

"Good-by."

The chief rang off.

He then turned to Harry, and said:

"It was Daisy Dean. She's in trouble. You must go right up to see her."

He thereupon explained to Harry what had been said.

The boy was startled at the news, and remarked:

"Those villains! They are at it again!"

"Have you any trace of Woods, yet?"

"No, chief. Do you think he could have done this?"

"It don't seem likely when you consider that he loves the girl dearly."

"Then, if the writer of that threatening note was the same party who killed the old merchant, how could it be Fred Woods? It's clear they want to scare the girl out of the country so she won't contest the Ranger will we found, made out in Andrew Blake's favor."

"If that's your theory," said the chief, "Blake is the only one interested in getting the girl out of his way. Isn't it possible, therefore, that Blake is the guilty man?"

CHAPTER XII.

A FIGHT IN THE DARK.

With that awful strangling clutch tightened like a vise upon his throat, Old King Brady was dragged up through the trap into a dark cellar.

At the rear was a small window, with dust-covered glass that admitted only the faintest light into the spacious, gloomy place.

There was enough light for the detective to see his opponent, however.

He was the man in the steel mask.

The mysterious individual was alone.

Old King Brady's keen eyes were strained, but he dimly made out the fact that the cellar floor was littered with boxes, barrels, packages, coils of rope, anchor chains, old sails and a general assortment of ship's junk.

In an instant it flashed across his mind that this place was the storehouse in which the river thieves kept their booty.

But he had no time to comment. His wig was knocked off.

The man who held him was trying to choke the life out of him.

The detective began to struggle furiously to get free. But the man who held him was very powerful.

"You traitor!" he panted. "You have dogged my footsteps! I know you!"

"So I did," growled Old King Brady, seeing his disguise was penetrated.

"Then you mean to play me false with your prisoner, eh?"

"I hadn't the faintest intention of letting the rascal go."

"I might have known I couldn't trust a detective."

"Let go my throat!"

"Not till you're a corpse!"

"Then take that!"

And bang! went his fist against the man's stomach.

The mask uttered a mocking laugh and Old King Brady's hand ached as if it had come in contact with a brick wall.

He purposely refrained from striking at the man's metal-covered face, as he knew he could not injure him that way.

Now he made a discovery.

The man not only had his face protected with steel, but he evidently wore a suit of metal mail beneath his outer garments.

This was proven by the resistance his fist met.

It gave the detective cause to think the man was entirely bullet proof.

Feeling the awful grip tighten on his throat rendered him desperate.

He seized the man's wrists, and, exerting all his strength, he gave them a wrench that no human being could resist.

It made the man cry out with pain.

His grip relaxed.

Then he sprang back. He had knocked off the detective's wig and cap.

Relieved at once, Old King Brady drew a deep breath. Then he bounded at the man like an angry lion.

Throwing the whole weight of his body against the fellow, he bore him over backward upon the ground.

Landing on the unprotected back of his head with a crash, the man was stunned and lay motionless.

"I've got him!" chuckled Old King Brady.

He pulled out his dark lantern, drew aside the hood and flashed the bright rays upon the senseless man.

"Now I'll find out who he is!" he thought.

Kneeling down he tore open his victim's coat.

There were some papers in the man's inside pocket. Old King Brady pulled them out and put them in his own pocket.

"I'll examine these later on," he muttered.

Bending nearer to the man, he keenly surveyed the steel mask.

The lower part went down behind the man's collar.

A quick examination showed the old officer that it was securely bolted to the neck band of a metal suit beneath.

The top of the mask formed a skull cap, which fit snugly over the rascal's head, rendering it perfectly immovable.

"An uncomfortable rig to live in," thought the officer. "but he probably prefers the discomfort to running any risk of getting shot."

The question was, how to detach the mask.

He could only do this by stripping the man of his shirt of mail and reaching the bolt nuts on the under side.

Old King Brady was delighted. He put on his cap and wig again.

He felt sure of revealing this man's identity now.

"There's no doubt he's the leader of the gang of river thieves, else he wouldn't have run such a desperate risk to get his pal free. It's almost certain he fears we'll pump the prisoner. He don't want the lame man to give away any of the secrets of his gang. Such an exposure would be serious. It might lead to their arrest and the recovery of much of the booty. It would mean a long term of imprisonment for many of their number and perhaps electrocution for some of them. This fellow is cool and daring. He showed that by calling on Harry and me."

While pondering thus, Old King Brady was working at the man's clothing. He succeeded in reaching the shirt of steel mail.

It was a light, close-meshed cloth of steel.

So tough were the strands a pistol bullet could scarcely pierce it.

"He's well protected!" thought the detective, grimly.

He reached for the bolts.

In a few moments more he would have had the mask off.

But it was not to be.

Just then there sounded a rush of footsteps across the cellar.

Smothered voices were heard exclaiming:

"It's a stranger!"

"See! He's got our captain down!"

"Don't fire or a passing cop may hear the shot!"

Startled, Old King Brady bounded to his feet.

Turning his lantern, he saw a dozen masked men in rough clothing rushing toward him.

Some carried clubs, others pistols and not a few wicked-looking bowie knives flashed in the lantern light.

The detective saw that he could not hope to cope with this big crowd single-handed, so he resolved to run.

He was keenly disappointed at not first learning the identity of the mysterious masked man.

But there was no time to do that now.

His life was at stake. That was evident. These men would not hesitate to kill him to prevent exposure. They were a tough crowd and hated detectives violently. He put out his light.

Instantly the cellar was wrapped in gloom.

The detective had not located the open trap leading into the sewer, as he had no time to do so before masking his lantern.

He now had to grope around to find it.

All the time he was searching for it he could hear the gang creeping up closer and closer to him every moment.

"If we meet there will be war!" he muttered.

Just then his outstretched hand touched something.

It was a man's figure.

"Who's that?" whispered a low voice.

"Me!" cried Old King Brady.

Then his fist shot out.

Whack!

The blow sent the man flying.

Hearing his voice, the gang rushed for the spot it came from.

But he was gone.

He took care to dart out of the way.

Had this end of the cellar been as light as the rear, where the dusty window was, they would have seen him.

As they were between him and the dull light, he vaguely saw them now.

The sight almost made him laugh despite his peril.

Several of them met where he had been standing and clinched. They thought they had him and fought furiously to overcome each other before they realized their error.

While they were fighting Old King Brady found the open trap. Down the stone steps he darted as quick as a flash.

"Safe!" he muttered.

Reaching the bottom of the tunnel he found it flooded.

The tide was coming in. It only reached his knees, though, and he pushed his way through the brine as fast as possible.

Reaching the bend, he was just about to turn it when he heard a man up in the cellar yell:

"He's gone! See, my lantern shows it."

"Follow him down the sewer!" roared another.

A moment afterward he heard them coming down the stone stairs.

"It's about time for me to get out of here!" he thought.

Turning into the main tunnel, he heard the gang splashing along in hot pursuit, and he finally reached the exit.

Up on the beams he scrambled and in a few moments he got out from under the dock and went up the spiked pile to the stringpiece.

Not until he was near the ferry house did he feel safe.

With so many people around the gang would not attack him.

Rushing to the nearest police signal box, he opened it and yelled in the 'phone:

"Send a wagon with the reserves to the foot of East Twenty-third street at once!"

"What for?" demanded the police captain he had summoned.

"I'm Old King Brady. I've got a gang of river thieves cornered, and we may pull in the whole crowd if you lose no time about it."

"All right. Good-by!"

The old detective located the building in the cellar of which he had been.

It was a deserted, dilapidated structure with a "To Let" sign in the window.

Beside it was a fenced in yard.

He spent his time while waiting at watching both the house and the exit to the East River, but failed to see his men appear.

A quarter of an hour passed by.

It seemed to the impatient detective that the reserves would never come.

Finally, however, the patrol wagon came dashing down the street. It was heavily loaded with bluecoats and he ran to meet them.

Some of them knew him by sight, as he had taken off his head make-up.

"Where are your men?" queried the sergeant in command.

"In the cellar of that old building."

"River thieves?"

"Yes."

"Desperate?"

"They'll shoot on sight."

"Have they any way to escape?"

"One. Through the sewer. I'll show you."

"Then I'll divide my men and send half with you through the sewer, while I tackle them from the street end."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MAN IN THE BARREL.

While Old King Brady was rapidly mapping out a plan of action with the police sergeant an electric car came dashing up to them.

Young King Brady sprang from it.

Instantly he joined the group.

"I was in the chief's office when word of this raid came in," he explained, "and thinking you might want me, I came over as fast as I could."

"Good boy!" said Old King Brady, patting him on the back. "We do want you."

"What's going on?"

The old detective told him.

When he finished Harry explained all that had occurred to him.

Old King Brady listened intently and when Harry finished he said:

"If this raid is a success the masked man will land in jail. Then I'll go up to Ranger's with you."

"Evidently your disguise as an Italian didn't work."

"It did for a time. If the masked man saw me following in the hack he didn't know me, else he wouldn't have led me squarely into his den."

"But he knew you when you went up the trap."

"He pulled off my hat and wig. He's as sharp as a razor. When he choked me I couldn't disguise my voice. It probably gave me away entirely. Even if he thought I was an Italian at first, my voice confirmed his suspicions."

"Is he down there yet?"

"Probably."

"Are you ready?" asked the sergeant.

"Yes. Keep your clubs and revolvers handy, boys."

The sergeant, with half the platoon, charged on the door of the old building, broke it down and rushed in.

Under the lead of Old King Brady the rest went under the dock and up the fast filling sewer.

By the time they reached the stone steps the water was up to their thighs.

They heard a fearful crash above.

It was caused by the detachment of policemen breaking into the cellar.

A final crash told that the door had given way.

At the same moment a terrified voice above gasped:

"Come this way, quick, boys! Our only chance is to get out into the sewer.

"Are you sure it's the police raiding us?"

"Yes; the cap told me the supposed Dago was a fly cop."

"Then he's called for the police, and——"

"Run! Here they come. We'll have to swim down the sewer, as the tide has risen."

The next moment they started down through the trap.

"Halt!" roared Old King Brady from below.

His lantern light flashed up into their faces.

Caught between two fires, and, having no other avenue of escape, they recoiled dismayed.

"More cops!" yelled one of them, in horror.

"Here they come from above!" cried another.

"Don't give in!"

"Fight for it!"

"Draw your guns!"

These and other defiant cries rang out.

Old King Brady dashed up the steps, shouting:

"Follow me!"

At the same moment the police sergeant, followed by his men, came rushing down from the floor above, crying sternly:

"Surrender or we'll fire on you!"

Half a dozen bulls-eye lanterns flashed upon the scene from the hands of the officers and partially lit up the cellar.

Harry Brady placed himself on his old partner's side.

"Charge on them!" he cried, recklessly.

The police were inspired by his dauntless courage.

They went with a rush and the thieves dashed away.

But they could not escape.

Some shot at the officers.

Then the clubs began to fly right and left.

Many a rascal sank to the ground with a broken head and dismal groan, and several of the policemen were wounded by the flying bullets.

Both Bradys were in the thickest of the fight.

Harry pounced upon a man and hurled him to the floor just in time to prevent him shooting the police sergeant.

Old King Brady was looking for the man in the mask.

Although all his men were there, he had mysteriously disappeared.

With cowardly instinct, when he recovered his senses, he had left his men to fight their battle without his aid.

In a few moments the police had the gang surrounded.

In the centre of a ring of gleaming revolvers they saw that they were at the mercy of the police, and their courage gave out.

Old King Brady saw how they felt.

"Up with your hands or we'll shoot!" he exclaimed.

Every man in the gang obeyed.

The detective ran his glance over the crowd.

"Just twelve!" he thought.

There were fourteen policemen opposing them.

"Handcuff them together," ordered Old King Brady, "and disarm them."

A policeman gathered in their weapons and another officer secured the handcuffs carried by each of the bluecoats.

In a few moments the river thieves were secured in a string, each outside man being handcuffed to a policeman.

Addressing one of them, Old King Brady asked, sternly:

"Where's the man in the steel mask?"

"Our captain? I don't know."

"Did he leave the cellar?"

"I didn't see him go."

"Well, he isn't here now."

"I know it. I suppose he's hidden somewhere."

"Are there any hiding places in this cellar?"

"None except the sewer."

"How about the house upstairs."

"That's all fallen to pieces."

"How many were there in your gang?"

"Fifteen, with the captain."

"Isn't this the Red Hook Band?"

"Yes."

"There are two men missing—your captain and the other——"

"Limpy's in jail, ain't he?"

"Yes."

Old King Brady told the policemen to search the place. This was done. But nothing was seen of the two missing men.

The detective then continued questioning the prisoner:

"What's all the merchandise in this cellar—stolen stuff?"

"Yes," was the sullen reply.

"Is this all you have of it?"

"This is all."

"Whom do you sell it to?"

"I don't know. The captain attends to that."

This remark verified the lame prisoner's assertion.

"Well," said Harry, "as there are no more men to be found here, let's take the prisoners away. We can then send for this stuff."

They agreed to this.

Having marched the manacled gang upstairs, they were crowded in the police patrol wagon and driven away to the station house.

Old King Brady went with them to make the charge.

Several policemen were detailed to watch the place, in charge of Harry.

There was a big crowd of sightseers outside, attracted by the raid.

When the prisoners were taken away they dispersed.

Harry posted several policemen about the building—

some in the cellar, some in the yard and two outside the door.

The boy then went down in the cellar.

Looking down the trap he saw that the tide now filled the sewer.

"If the masked man was hidden down in the tunnel," muttered the boy, "the rising tide would drown him like a rat in a trap."

In a short time a truck was sent from the police station to get the thieves' booty from the cellar.

The work of loading the vehicle was done by the officers.

It was no easy task to get some of the heavy boxes and barrels up from the cellar and upon the truck.

Finally, however, the work was done.

Harry got on the truck with the driver and a policeman, and they started for the police station.

The truck went slowly jolting along the street and presently reached First avenue.

Just then the lid of a big sugar barrel, which was deftly hinged, was raised and the head of the man in the steel mask appeared.

At one glance he saw that no one on the truck was looking his way.

As quietly as a mouse he got out of the barrel and got down to the street.

The rascal had kept this barrel in the cellar as a hiding place, and got into it when the police raided the place, as he recovered his senses in the meantime.

Several holes in the barrel gave him plenty air to breathe, and a hook on the inside of the barrel permitted him to fasten down the head so that it looked like an unopened barrel.

In moving the barrel from the cellar the police had given him a severe shaking, but he was otherwise uninjured and his presence unsuspected.

At the moment he alighted he was near a station of the elevated railroad, and he was heading for it when Harry chanced to glance around.

The boy instantly noticed the open barrel.

The next instant he caught a view of the masked man.

As the truth of the matter flashed across his mind he sprang from the truck and made a rush for the fugitive.

The man in the mask saw him coming and rushed up the station stairs.

After him ran Harry.

Through the gate darted the river thief.

A train was just leaving for downtown.

He just had time to seize the rail of the rear platform on the last car and spring upon the narrow foothold outside the rail as the cars dashed past.

Safe, he was carried with it.

Out rushed Harry on the station platform.

He saw his prey escaping and gave a cry of anger.

"He's lost!" he cried.

As the train swung around the curve the masked man mockingly waved his hand to the boy and shouted:

"Good by forever! I've foiled you!"

The next moment he was gone.

It was useless to chase him, the boy knew, for he had too great a start and could make his escape with no trouble.

"We'll meet again!" the boy muttered, grimly.

CHAPTER XIV.

CATCHING WOODS.

Harry met Old King Brady at the police station, and told him what had happened.

"The villain had on his steel mask," said the boy in conclusion, "and as it's broad daylight, he'll attract attention going through the street with that odd face covering on, and the nearest policeman will grab him."

"Don't you worry about that foxy gentleman," replied Old King Brady with a smile. "He'll alight at some station, go into the waiting-room, take off his mask, and when he goes down to the street he will look like any other mortal."

"We've broken up his gang, and recovered hundreds of dollars worth of booty anyhow," said Harry with some satisfaction.

"That's just what the chief ordered us to do."

"Let's go and report our luck to him."

"Very well. You go. I'm going down to the Bureau of Vital Statistics."

"What for?"

"To hunt for information about the birth of Daisy Dean."

"All right. When we call there, we shall have some news for her."

The detectives then separated.

It was almost nightfall when Harry reached headquarters.

The chief eyed him impatiently, and asked:

"Why in thunder haven't you been up to Ranger's yet, Harry? That girl up there has been pestering the life out of me by ringing me up on the 'phone every hour to ask why you don't call."

The boy smiled and replied:

"Don't get impatient, sir."

"But, I tell you——"

"We've been very busy, chief."

"Doing what?"

"Capturing the river thieves."

"Ah! Have you got them?"

"Twelve."

"All?"

"No. The captain and one man escaped."

"That's a pity."

"We've proved that the man in the steel mask is the captain of the gang."

"I expected as much."

"When we nab him, and the missing thief, our work will be finished."

"You've crippled them, and broken up the organization anyway."

"Of course. As soon as Old King Brady arrives, we'll go to Ranger's."

"Very well. Then I shan't bother pumping the lame prisoner any more. The mate of the Nancy Jane has proven his ownership to the $250 we found on the prisoner, and got the money back."

In due time Old King Brady returned.

"What luck did you have?"

"The best. Wait, and I'll spring a surprise on you. Did you tell the chief?"

"Yes—everything."

"Then come home till we change our wet clothing. Then we'll go up to Ranger's. When Daisy Dean hears what I've learned at the bureau, and at Bellevue Hospital, she'll be the most amazed girl in the whole wide world."

Old King Brady had forgotten all about the papers he had taken from the man in the mask, when he knocked the rascal senseless in the cellar of the thieves' den.

In changing his clothes he left these papers in the pocket of the suit in which he was made up as an Italian laborer.

The Bradys then started for the Ranger residence.

It did not take long to reach the mansion, and they failed to see any lights in any of the windows as they drew near the place.

There was a cab outside the door, though.

As the detectives approached it, they were startled to hear a smothered shriek.

It was the voice of a woman, and came from the cab.

Through one of the open windows they saw the unmistakable features of Daisy and the next moment they saw the man in the steel mask thrust his head out of the cab window and heard him shout furiously to the driver.

"Go, for your life! I've got her chloroformed. Here come those accursed detectives!"

The driver, who was the missing member of the river thieves gang, gave his horse a cut with the whip that made the animal spring forward as if stung.

Again and again the cruel whip fell whistling upon the poor beast, and goaded to madness it sped away at a terrific pace.

"How in the world are we to aid that girl?" blankly asked Harry.

"Only by getting on their trail, and running them down."

"The carriage was heading for the city."

"We can beat it to Harlem Bridge by taking a train, Harry."

"That's our only way. Now—ah! what's that?"

He had suddenly seen a man's figure.

Grasping Old King Brady's arm, he darted behind a tree.

Peering around the trunk, they saw the familiar figure of Fred Woods.

The young man was prowling around the house peering in at the windows and as the moonlight fell upon his face they saw that it was pale and haggard.

His eyes were sunken by mental suffering, and he had a

"It's Woods!" whispered Harry. "He looks bad, too."

"Yes. Poor fellow. I'm sorry for him, but we must arrest him."

"I suppose he's poking around here looking for his girl."

"No doubt of it. Come on."

Just then the private secretary arrived within a few feet of them.

Old King Brady stepped from behind the tree and tapped him on the arm, causing him to start, recoil with a smothered cry of alarm, and gasp:

"Eh? Who's that? What do you want, sir?"

"Fred Woods, you are my prisoner!" said Old King Brady.

"Detectives!" he exclaimed aghast.

"Just so."

"What is the charge?"

"Murder!"

"As I feared!" he groaned. "I am innocent."

"Can you prove it?"

"Only by proving the guilt of the real criminal."

"Why?"

"Because I was seen in a position which made me seem guilty."

"We know all about that. Do you charge any one else with the deed?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"A man in a steel mask."

"What!"

"Yes! I can swear to it."

"Did you see that man commit the deed?"

"I did!"

"Why—he swore he saw you do it."

"That was done to turn the tables on me and save himself."

"Let us know, if you were guiltless, why you fled?"

"The evidence was so strong against me that I feared it would convict me."

"You refer to James finding you in the room bending over the corpse with a heavy cane clutched in your hand, don't you?"

"I do."

"Where have you been concealed?"

"In Brooklyn."

"And what brought you here to-night?"

"An irresistible longing to see Miss Ranger and vindicate myself to her."

"Do you know yet why that girl refused to marry you—why Mr. Ranger withheld his consent?"

"I do not."

"It was because she was an unknown waif, left on Ranger's doorstep, in her infancy. She did not want to wed you until her identity was established."

"Great heaven! How I wronged her and poor old Mr. Ranger! I thought it was because I was poor, and they were wealthy. I've made a grave error. I had no right to quarrel with my kind-hearted old employer. And as

me. I would not have minded that at all. She was too honorable for such a wretch as I am."

"Well, we have cleared up the mystery of her parentage."

"How?"

"By inquiries. I learned that she is the daughter of Andrew Blake."

"Good heavens!"

"Yes. Blake deserted his sick wife and baby. Mrs. Blake left the child on the doorstep of her good-hearted brother-in-law, well knowing he'd care for the child. To spare her husband, she designated the child Daisy Dean, her full name being Daisy Dean Blake. She confessed to the hospital authorities before she died in Bellevue. They kept a record of the story. The Bureau of Vital Statistics has a record of the birth of Daisy Dean Blake, daughter of Andrew and Margaret Blake."

"Then Mr. Ranger was really her uncle?"

"Of course. Now you say you are innocent of killing Mr. Ranger."

"I can swear to it, I told you. I saw the masked man do it."

"Describe what took place that night."

"I can easily do that. I was discharged, but had not left the house. Well, that night I went to Mr. Ranger's room. The quarrel was resumed. I left the room. Shortly after I heard him cry out. I ran in. There was the man in the steel mask, kneeling before the safe, robbing it of the $5,000 it contained and Mr. Ranger saw him and got up. The man carried a heavy cane. He struck Mr. Ranger the blow that killed him. He stood thinking a moment. Then he drew a paper from his pocket and dropped it on the floor among the other papers he had pulled from the safe. He picked up another paper, saw me and fled out the window. His shoes left mud prints on the carpet. I rushed over to Mr. Ranger, and picked up the heavy cane. Bending over the body, I saw he was dead. Just then James entered and saw me. Realizing that after my quarrel with Mr Ranger I'd be considered guilty of the crime after being caught in such a compromising position, I said, 'I'll be arrested for this!' I rushed out. James tried to stop me. But I escaped. Then I hid. This is the first time I've been out since that awful night."

"Well, it did look black for you," said Old King Brady, "but we think we can vindicate you. Come on, and we'll see what we can do for you!"

"I'd sooner go to jail than suffer this mental torture any longer," said Woods, and he walked away with the detectives, a prisoner.

CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

Upon reaching the city and having Woods locked up the Bradys sent out a general alarm among the police for the

They left word at headquarters to have any news of the cab sent to their house.

Then they went home.

As they entered their cosy apartments Old King Brady suddenly said:

"There! By jingo, I forgot those papers I pulled out of the masked man's pocket. I left them in the jacket of my Italian disguise. I'll look them over."

Several were of no interest, but the last one was.

It proved to be the will—the will of Hiram Ranger—the will in which he bequeathed his entire fortune to Daisy!

The Bradys were startled; then the old detective said:

"Blake evidently don't know he's fighting against his own daughter."

"I don't believe he does. It will amaze him when he finds it out."

"Harry, I wonder if Blake is in league with the masked man."

"Why?"

"Because everything the steel mask has done thus far has been for Blake's interest. Before the masked man picked up this will he dropped a paper to the floor. That paper may have been the will I found made out in Blake's favor. If that's the case, why we have the whole thing down fine."

"It's reasonable to think so."

"Then that would account for a seeming mystery. Armed with a will to which James' and Mary Ann's signatures were forged, the masked man called on the merchant, and made him sign a paper, the contents of which Mr. Ranger did not see. That was why the writing expert found the signature genuine and those of the witnesses forged. It would have been easy to forge the names of Ranger's lawyer and notary, as one was dead and the other missing, and no one would be the wiser. Then it was necessary to steal the original will and leave the forged one in its place and the trick was done."

"Yes, but how was any one to know who the lawyer and notary and witnesses of Mr. Ranger's will really were, what the merchant had to leave, and——"

"The easiest thing in the world for an interested party to steal the original will, copy it, changing only the name of the legatee and return it to the safe, or keep it abstracted. My opinion is that the original will was stolen long ago and copied, and the bogus will was left in its place on the night of the murder."

At this moment the ringing of the telephone bell interrupted them.

Harry answered it.

When he finished he said to his partner:

"Report from the —— precinct saying a cab of the description we gave was seen by a policeman stationed at the Thirty-fourth street ferry just going aboard a boat."

They rushed from the house.

A near-by cab was awaiting them and they drove like made for the ferry.

Disappointed but determined, the Bradys ran down a near-by dock at which they had seen a tug boat tying up.

"Twenty dollars if you put us aboard that ferryboat," said Old King Brady to the captain of the tug.

"I'll go you. Jump aboard," was the reply.

A moment after they were on the tug it was unmoored and away.

It was a fast boat and quickly overhauled the ferryboat.

As it ranged up to the ferryboat the Bradys easily got aboard.

Old King Brady glanced down the horse gangways.

There was only one vehicle aboard and they recognized it instantly as the one they wanted.

The driver saw them coming and warned the man in the carriage.

Both of the rascals drew their revolvers upon finding themselves cornered.

Before either could use them Harry fired.

The ball struck and wounded the driver and he fell groaning to the deck.

An imprecation escaped the masked man and he sprang forward, his foot struck the edge of a plank and he tripped and fell.

His revolver fell from his hand to the deck.

Before he could recover himself the Bradys pounced upon him and a fearful struggle ensued between them.

They soon overpowered him and handcuffed his wrists behind his back.

Meantime Daisy, who had revived from the drug, sprang from the cab and saw the Bradys fighting her enemy.

The passengers and deck hands, alarmed by the noise, rushed out on deck.

Among them was the old lawyer, Philip Murdock, who was on his way home.

"At last!" panted Old King Brady, "we've got you."

"I'll beat you yet!" hissed the masked man, wildly.

"Let's see your face now," laughed the old detective. "Harry—secure his accomplice."

And he went at the helpless man again vigorously, loosened the thumb screws and pulled the hideous mask away.

The spectators looked on amazed.

Particularly Mr. Murdock.

"Why, bless me!" he cried, glaring at the unmasked man. "It's Andrew Blake!"

"Fool!" groaned the prisoner. "You've got me in trouble now!"

"So you are Mr. Ranger's stepbrother, eh?" asked Old King Brady.

"What if I am?" was the sullen reply.

"I'll tell you. In the first place, I've got evidence that you are the leader of the river thieves known as the Red Hook Band."

"Well, I admit it."

"In the second place, I've got proof that you murdered Mr. Ranger."

"Well, I admit that, too, although I didn't mean ta

"In the third place, I've found out that Daisy Dean is your own daughter."

"Great heaven! Is that so?" he asked, in startled tones.

"Yes. You were trying to cheat your own child," said Old King Brady.

He thereupon explained all that is known to the reader.

When he finished Blake glanced up and said in husky tones:

"It's of no use to deny anything. I see plainly that there's enough evidence against me on any one of the counts to settle my case. I'll admit this. I stole Ranger's original will, copied it and made him sign the forged one. I kept the original, which you afterward got from my pocket. I didn't know the girl was my daughter. I wanted to prevent her inheriting that money so I could get it. Fred Woods' story of the crime was true. Mine was a lie."

Daisy had heard all that passed.

She was like a person fairly stunned.

"Why did you abduct her?" demanded Old King Brady, pointing at the girl.

"To get her out of the way. I was going to have her confined in an asylum when I missed the will you took from me, as she would be gone, and I'd be sure to get Ranger's money anyway, as the nearest relation."

When the boat returned to New York Harry put Daisy in a hotel and the prisoners were locked up.

Next day Blake made a full confession of his guilt on the various charges and Fred Woods was exonerated and set at liberty.

Harry conducted him to Daisy's hotel.

The meeting between the lovers was very affecting.

They made up their little quarrel and were married at once, for Woods considered that the girl needed a protector.

The forged will and other papers were useless, now that nothing was to be proven by them, and Old King Brady destroyed them.

He next had the genuine will filed for probate with the surrogate and in due course of time Daisy came into her inheritance.

Andrew Blake was tried, convicted of manslaughter, and for his various crimes he received a long sentence in prison.

His gang of river thieves also went to jail.

The Bradys were elated over their success with their work.

"You have done nobly," the chief said to them. "In bringing this case to an issue you accomplished several good deeds."

And so we must end this story.

But we are not yet to part with the Bradys.

There was new and startling work cut out for them, which we will soon have the pleasure of describing in another story.

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